# MODERNISM AS A WORKING FAITH

W. MAURICE PRYKE, B.D.

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AS A
# WORKING FAITH

*by*

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# Preface.

LABELS are generally misleading. If certain churchmen to-day wear the label 'Modernist,' it is not because in the first instance they deliberately chose it, but rather for the reason that it was affixed to them by others as a badge of reproach. But however acquired, the name Modernist has come to stay, and history offers not a few examples of the opprobrious label rescued from its lowly or unpleasing associations and transformed into a title of honour and respect. At any rate the English Modernist is content with his label, and does not seek to change it.

The chapters which follow constitute an attempt to vindicate Modernism as a working faith. For the most part they have already appeared as articles in theological magazines, and I am grateful to the editors for permission to republish them in book form. It will be clear that what has been written has been written not for the experts who, from the nature of the case, must always be comparatively few in number, but for the much larger body of educated people who, while in no sense specialists, are to a greater or less extent puzzled or disturbed by the conclusions, whether definite or tentative, of biblical criticism as these are understood in our own day.

Whatever may be thought of the teaching contained in this book, it may at least be claimed that

it has been tested by fifteen years of practical experience in town and country parishes. If that experience has served to strengthen my conviction that the future belongs to Modernism, it is not from a complacent assurance that the Modernist is invariably right, or that the new and the true ought always to be identified, but because I find in Modernism a method of approach to religious questions which enables the Modernist to distinguish more readily than others between husk and kernel, and to accept new truth unhindered by the haunting suspicion that in so doing he is guilty of disloyalty towards some 'divine deposit' of imposed beliefs.

In religion, as in life, a conflict of loyalties must lead ultimately to disaster. The creed of the Traditionalist, like the White Knight in *Alice through the Looking Glass*, appears to be unduly hampered by a heterogeneous collection of articles which add nothing to its true effectiveness, while the Modernist just because he travels light and is unencumbered by a paraphernalia of beliefs, not a few of which are of dubious utility, can move more rapidly to the centre of the conflict between faith and doubt, and so may render upon occasion at any rate a more efficient service to his Master's cause. Nor, I think, can it be questioned that a Modernist presentation of Christianity, precisely by reason of its greater simplicity of expression, may sometimes prove of help to those who from temperament or upbringing tend to find themselves out of sympathy with more traditional expositions of the Christian faith.

Chapter I. has already appeared in the *Review of the Churches*; parts of Chapters II., IV., and XII. have been published in the *Modern Churchman*; Chapters III., VII. and VIII. have appeared in the *Challenge*; chapters V. and IX. in the *Pilgrim*; Chapter X. was originally printed in the *Interpreter*. Chapters VI. and XI. are now published for the first time.

W. MAURICE PRYKE.

Risby, 1925.

# Chapter I.

## Modernism and the Man in the Street.

One of the commonest objections urged against the Modernist presentation of Christianity is that it is unsuited to the needs and understanding of the ordinary man. In the course of a scholarly examination of the Modernist position, as he understands it, the Rev. E. J. Bicknell, Vice-Principal of Cuddesdon Theological College, exclaims triumphantly, 'We have never yet met a Modernist kitchen-maid.'[1] The whole field may be seen through a small hole in the hedge, and the alleged scarcity of Modernist kitchen-maids may justly be said to form the true gravamen of the Traditionalist charge against us. If Christianity is a religion with a universal appeal, if Christ is the Saviour of simple and learned alike, then any presentation of the Christian message which limits that appeal to the few, or obscures the significance of Jesus for all but the scholar and the theologian, certainly ought to be decisively rejected. It is the purpose of this chapter to maintain, in opposition to the Traditionalist argument, that Modernism, when rightly understood, is no mere barren collection of negative propositions, no uneasy resting place where a man may pause insecurely for a moment before plunging headlong down the slippery slope of infidelity, no dishonest refuge for highly placed

[1] *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles*, p. 333.

ecclesiastics clinging desperately to lucrative and influential positions with small moral justification. We shall contend rather that apart from Modernism Christianity has no future, since without that unification of religion with modern thought for which the Modernist is working, the gulf between the Churches and the man in the street must grow continually wider, until at length religion and obscurantism shall have become almost interchangeable terms, and that unhappy identification of faith with credulity, towards which many in our own day appear to be moving, shall have attained its completion.

Far from tamely acquiescing in the supposed existence of phalanxes of Traditionalist kitchenmaids, we dare to affirm that the simple Christian believer, the ordinary man, untroubled by the doubts and difficulties which beset the minds of his more sophisticated contemporaries (so far indeed as he exists at all, and is not the mere figment of clerical imagination), is at heart potentially, if not yet actually and avowedly, a thoroughgoing Modernist. The late Dr. Sanday, whose writings I shall have frequent occasion to quote in the course of this chaper, and whose courageous avowal of the Modernist cause towards the end of a long life spent in the defence of a more conservative position brought upon him the bitter and unmerited attacks of many who had called themselves his friends, rebuts the charge of undue intellectualism, frequently levelled against the Modernist, in words worthy of quotation. He writes: [1]

[1] *Form and Content in the Christian Tradition*, p. 14.

'We are told that Modernism tends to place a gap between the learned and the simple. Just the contrary. It tends to bring the learned and the simple nearer together. Its whole effect ought to be to induce the learned to formulate their beliefs in terms which they can share whole-heartedly with the simple. It is really the Traditionalists who do what they accuse us of doing. They would bind upon the unlearned all the technical apparatus of ancient tradition.'

Here at any rate is one distinguished advocate of Modernism in the kitchen!

But it is time to come to definitions. For practical purposes most of us know pretty well the sort of person we mean by the man in the street, but many, if called upon to give an explanation of the term Modernism, or to furnish an intelligent account of Modernist beliefs, would find it not altogether easy to comply. Unhappily even among the clergy there are some critics of Modernism for whom the name Modernist is practically synonymous with Infidel, and who are not ashamed to apply such adjectives as 'slippery' and 'sophistical' to men whose work as teachers and theologians has won for them an honoured place in the estimation of their fellow scholars. To the critic of this class, the uncontrolled violence of whose invective is matched only by the abysmal ignorance of Modernist thought which his criticism invariably discloses, it is enough to reply: An opponent's case, if it is to be convincingly demolished, or even helpfully criticised, must first be studied with some measure of sympathy, and with at least an honest attempt to view the matters in dispute from the other's angle. Where these things are absent, the mere

vilification of an adversary will serve no purpose but that of weakening the cause which you yourself desire to champion.

But it is probably the case that the majority of Christians to-day are not so much definitely hostile to Modernism as vaguely puzzled by what they tend to regard as the merely negative attitude adopted by the Modernist towards time-honoured beliefs, which to them it appears impious even to question, and still more impious categorically to deny. With people of this type the Modernist has the keenest sympathy, and in their case he desires nothing more than the opportunity to remove misunderstandings, and to explain as clearly and frankly as possible the meaning and implications of his faith.

Dr. Sanday defined his own position thus: 'I do not disclaim,' he said in the last lecture which he delivered as Lady Margaret Professor:[1]

'I do not disclaim the name Modernist. The name describes justly what I aim at being. I aim at thinking the thoughts and speaking the language of my own day, and yet at the same time keeping all that is essential in the religion of the past. I fully believe that it is possible to do this. If I did not think so, I should not be here.'

Ten years ago at the conclusion of his reply to what he himself termed 'Bishop Gore's Challenge to Criticism,' he wrote as follows:[2]

'If it be said that what I have written is Modernism, I would reply that I believe—I emphatically and hopefully believe—that a sound and right Modernism is

[1] *Divine Overruling*, p. 67.
[2] *Bishop Gore's Challenge to Criticism*, p. 30.

really possible; that the Saviour of mankind extends His arms towards the cultivated modern man, just as much as He does towards the simple believer. I believe that the cultivated modern man may enter the Church of Christ with his head erect—with some changes of language due to difference of times, but of the nature of reinterpretation of old truths, and without any real equivocation in his heart. I believe that he can afford to say what he really thinks—provided only that his fellow Christians of more traditional types are willing to greet him with the sympathetic intelligence which he deserves, and do not turn towards him the cold shoulder of suspicion and denunciation.'

And finally in a pamphlet written in answer to the late Bishop of Zanzibar, and published in 1920 after the death of the author, Dr. Sanday wrote:[1]

'Modernism stands fundamentally for what I have called elsewhere "the unification of thought." The Liberal feels that he cannot at any point stop short of this. It is the same mind that has to think of things secular and of things sacred, and the processes of thinking for both are the same. What are called the laws of thought are applicable alike to both.'

To these quotations we may add the definition of Modernism given by the late Father George Tyrrell:[2] 'By a Modernist,' he says, 'I mean a churchman of any sort who believes in the possibility of a synthesis between the essential truth of his religion and the essential truth of Modernity.'

It will be seen then that the Modernist stands for the principle of what has been well termed 'continuity of thought and relativity of expression.' He desires not new dogmas, but where necessary a new interpretation of old ones. He distinguishes

[1] *The Position of Liberal Theology*, p. 31.

[2] Quoted in *The Modern Churchman* for June, 1922.

frankly between Religion and Theology, between faith in a living God and belief in any catalogue of formal propositions, between facts of vital importance to Christianity, and the temporary and possibly mistaken modes of their expression in Creeds and Gospels. He believes whole-heartedly in the doctrine of progressive revelation; his God is a living God, who speaks to the men of to-day no less directly and authoritatively than He spoke to those of an earlier age. He believes in a God-directed freedom as essential to the true life whether of an individual or of a Church, and while reverencing the past he has no faith in infallibilities, and refuses to hold his mind in the shackles of even the most venerable tradition. For him truth is one even as God is one. He will not divide his mind into compartments, nor stultify his thinking by branding certain avenues of thought as heretical and therefore closed to further investigation. While thankfully accepting the testimony of the New Testament documents to the truth of Christianity, he strives to verify that truth within the region of his own experience, and he will accept nothing as binding for faith and conscience merely because it is imposed upon him at the bidding of an external authority. Not of course that he would condemn Creeds or despise Theology, but for him they are finger-posts to further truth rather than tyrants which bar the way to fresh discoveries of the mind of God. His positive ideals are those of Truth, Freedom, Simplification and Intelligibility, and in the interests of these he is prodigal of thought and service.

If the foregoing is a fair account of the principles

of which Modernism is the attempted expression, an adequate statement of the Modernist way of approach to religion and to life, we must seek to discover the bearing of these principles upon the interpretation of the Christian Faith, with a view to the frank answering of two questions of fundamental importance. (1) How far does the Modernist presentation of Christianity satisfy the religious needs and aspirations of the ordinary man? And (2) Granted that that presentation is at once not in conflict with the mind of Christ, and acceptable, when rightly understood, to 'the Christian in the street,' is it sufficiently in line with the demands of official orthodoxy to allow room for the Modernist, who desires to retain both his freedom and his personal sincerity, to stand within the confines of the organised Churches?

The Modernist view of the Old Testament is that adopted by practically all biblical scholars of repute at the present day. He regards it not as a Book but as a Library. While far from desirous of questioning its inspiration, he is careful to reject the disastrous equation of inspiration with infallibility. And he sees clearly that unless its influence is to prove positively harmful, the fullest advantage must be taken of the researches of scholars who, by placing the books in their chronological order, have enabled the ordinary man to trace for himself the progressive revelation of the mind and character of God which the Old Testament contains. He recognises to the full the appalling consequences which have ensued from the official identification of the savage and war-loving deity

of primitive Hebrew thought with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he would see the modern man delivered forthwith from the horrible incubus of an infallible Bible, whose legends of the world's beginning are even now in some quarters offered as serious competitors with the most assured conclusions of modern science for the allegiance of the twentieth century Christian.

But the Modernist refuses no less definitely to be content with a virtually infallible New Testament. It is not that he regards the Gospel narratives as historically worthless, still less that he is prone to undervalue the importance of a historical basis for the Christian religion, or to suppose that ideas can be divorced from facts without irremediable loss. No less emphatically than the most ardent Traditionalist does the Modernist insist upon the crucial importance to Christianity of a historical Incarnation. Indeed it is to the Modernist, or Liberal, that we owe the revival of interest in the Jesus of History, and in what was termed the 'Christ Myth' controversy it was the Liberal scholar, with his exact knowledge of the Gospels, his intelligent use of critical methods, his freedom from ecclesiastical presuppositions, who was enabled to strike the shrewdest blows on behalf of the general reliability of the Gospel portrait of Jesus. A study of the literature which that controversy produced would help towards a clearer recognition of the value of true criticism in rebutting the irresponsible assertions of the mere theory-monger, and establishing the existence of Jesus of Nazareth as a historical personality beyond the possibility of reasonable

doubt. The accusation that the Modernist makes light of history, if true at all, is true only of certain Roman Catholic Modernists of the school of Loisy, who certainly tended to suggest a disastrous distinction between Faith and Fact, and to separate the Jesus of History from the glorified Christ of Catholic Dogma. To the mind of the English Modernist such juggling with truth in the interests of an ecclesiastical organisation is frankly abhorrent. For us there is no irreconcilable gulf between Jesus and Christ, no artificial distinction between Faith and Fact. With the great Protestant critics of the Continent, men of the calibre of von Harnack, Jülicher, or the late Johannes Weiss, we stand unhesitatingly for the essential accuracy of the New Testament characterisation of Jesus, and in so doing strive to interpret the mind of the eternal Christ by reference to its historical expression in a human life.

At the same time there is the widest difference between an unequivocal insistence upon the importance of a historical basis for Christianity and a wholesale and uncritical acceptance of all which the Gospels contain as literally and indubitably true. If the Modernist refuses to make the distinction between truths of Faith and truths of Fact, he is quite ready on occasion to distinguish between Fact and Mode; that is to say, while accepting the pivotal Christian doctrines of the Incarnation, the Atonement and the Resurrection, and while refusing categorically to allow any severance of these doctrines from their connection in history with the personality of Jesus of Nazareth,

he holds himself at liberty to restate their significance by the help of the Christian experience of two thousand years, and with reference to the categories of modern thought. In studying the Gospel narratives the Modernist gives the closest possible attention to the motives which prompted their construction, laying stress not so much upon the comparatively short time which elapsed between the occurrence of the alleged facts and their relation by the Evangelists, as upon the speed with which, given the necessary motives, the congenial environment, the suitable vocabulary, narratives can be modified and teaching altered altogether unconsciously at the urgent bidding of apologetic demands. A striking example of the undoubted influence exercised by apologetic tendencies upon historical facts is found in the detailed treatment of the Passion Story in all four Gospels, a treatment which owes less to the supposed wealth of historical reminiscence at the disposal of the writers than to the ever present stumbling-block of the Cross, and the consequent necessity of discovering at once its prediction and explanation in the sacred pages of the Old Testament. Hence the increasing elaboration of the proof from Scripture as an apologetic weapon of the first importance, a weapon employed with comparative moderation in our second Gospel, wielded with greater boldness and frequency by the other Evangelists, and used with total incongruity and a complete lack of all restraint in the writings of Justin, Barnabas and the later Christian Apologists. For the Modernist, observing these and similar facts, the argument from the

strength of a motive as a formative influence upon the Gospel records is more potent than the argument from the shortness of the time between the occurrence of certain events and the embodiment of the story of those events in a written narrative.

It is frequently asserted with more emphasis than charity that the Modernist denies alike the Incarnation and the Resurrection. And while the assertion is definitely and even ridiculously untrue, it is worth while on the principle that there is no smoke without a fire, to investigate the causes of so serious an accusation. Rightly or wrongly there are Modernists who claim to suspend judgment as to the literal truth both of the stories of the Virgin Birth and of the Empty Tomb. Even here the case is one not of positive denial but of inability definitely to affirm. No Modernist would regard either of these stories as fraudulent inventions, nor deny that they are vehicles of what has been well termed 'relative truth,' yet, since we can accept neither an infallible New Testament, nor an infallible Creed, nor an infallible Church, and since we hold ourselves free to examine impartially the truth of all narratives by the test of the whole sum of available evidence, we claim the right to apply in these instances our fundamental distinction between Fact and Mode. While to make this distinction is to deny neither the Incarnation nor the Resurrection, it is certainly true that for those whose faith in these central Christian assertions hinges upon the Virgin Birth and the Empty Tomb the distinction may appear at first sight illegitimate, if not radically insincere.

The problem here presented is part of the larger problem of the miraculous element in general. And there is no region where a synthesis between the affirmations of Christianity and the best scientific thought of the day is at once more urgent and more difficult to obtain, just because nowhere else is the essential divergence between ancient and modern modes of thought more obviously apparent. It is true of course that many of the miracles of healing are becoming increasingly credible to the modern man, inasmuch as well attested parallels are being adduced from the camps of Medicine and Psychology. But from the point of view of the older apologetic at any rate, such parallels, if admitted, would have been regarded with something not far removed from actual disfavour as tending to detract from the uniqueness of the acts of Christ. As Archbishop Trench expressed it in his famous *Notes on the Miracles of our Lord*, an act which can be repeated as a result of an advance in human knowledge may be *mirabile*, it cannot be *miraculum*. Whereas, that is to say, the older defenders of Christianity found support in the miracles precisely in the degree that they were *contra Naturam*, and hence incapable of repetition, modern apologetic finds itself not seldom embarrassed by the stories of miracles in the Gospels, tending either to explain such stories as non-miraculous, as involving, that is to say, no breach with natural law, or as legendary in as far at any rate as they contain features which are seemingly miraculous in the older and stricter sense of that term's use. To some extent at any rate every Christian, whether Orthodox or Modernist,

must sympathise with the point of view here presented, since it originates not with those who would eliminate God from the natural order, but rather with those who believe whole-heartedly in a rational, divinely-controlled universe, who refuse to see God solely 'in the gaps,' who fear, with some reason, that if God is to be discovered only in the unexplained, every advance in human knowledge will tend to drive God more and more to the circumference of His world, until at last human ingenuity and human skill shall bow the Creator politely but firmly out of His own universe. The modern apologetic arises primarily from an intense conviction that the best thought of the age must be unified if Christianity is to retain its hold on the modern mind.

For myself, while I am unwilling to enter into any detailed discussion of the *a priori* possibility or impossibility of miracle in a rational universe, I believe that the presence of miracle stories in the Gospels can be explained without resort to the hypothesis that miracles happen, if by miracle is meant an act *contra Naturam*, and significant precisely on that account. For the Evangelists, it should be remembered, the problem of the relation of miracle to natural law did not arise, inasmuch as where the conception of natural law was wholly lacking, the difficulty resulting from apparent breaches of that law could not obtrude itself. In an uncritical age anything might happen, however extraordinary, however unreasonable. To men whose minds were steeped in the Old Testament, who accepted Old Testament miracles without

question, who, moreover, had been in daily contact with the dominating personality of Jesus, and who, long before any word of our Gospels was written, had come to think of him as the Messiah to whose coming the entire Old Testament had looked forward—to such men the tendency to model their own narratives after the pattern of Scripture, and to expect the miraculous rather than to question its possibility must have been little short of inevitable. It seems probable, therefore, that the acts which we call miracles are patient of a non-miraculous explanation, that, as Dr. Sanday expressed it,[1] 'miracle in the old sense belongs not so much to the facts as to the record of the facts,' that accordingly 'the time has come when the definition of miracle ought to be amended,'[2] that, in fact, it should now be possible 'to keep the idea of miracle, but to eliminate from it the idea of the abnormal.'[3]

If then we can accept this account of Modernist beliefs with reference to the Gospels as broadly accurate, we have next to enquire how far the position of the Modernist is likely to prove acceptable to the ordinary man. Thus expressed the question appears at first sight to cast a slur alike upon the disinterestedness of the Christian teacher and upon the religious sincerity of the man in the street. The aim of the teacher, in as far as he understands aright the seriousness of his vocation, is to teach not what is acceptable to the majority but what is true, and that altogether apart from possible

[1] *Liberal Theology*, p. 33.
[2] *Divine Overruling*, p. 66.
[3] *ibid.*, p. 16

disagreeable consequences to career or pocket. Unfortunately there are some at any rate for whom the call of expediency is stronger than the call of truth, and who for that reason are found openly to advocate the suppression of truth and the resort to a highly partisan presentation of religious beliefs, not indeed on grounds of personal advantage to themselves as teachers, but at the bidding, as they would express it, of the higher expediency. Put crudely, they believe themselves to be confronted with some such alternative as the following: 'Modernism is true but will not work; Orthodoxy works but is not true.' For the sake, therefore, of a 'working' Christianity which, though admittedly imperfect from the side of truth, yet achieves results for life and character too valuable to be disregarded, these teachers are frankly opposed, in the interests of simple faith, full churches, and tangible good results, to any attempted popularisation of Modernist tenets. However much we may be inclined to sympathise with this attitude, prompted as it undoubtedly is by a genuine solicitude not merely for the prosperity of the Church as an organisation, but for the highest welfare and lasting spiritual peace of individual human souls, we have reluctantly to admit that in the last resort the argument from the higher expediency is nothing else than a polite name for equivocation and a contempt for truth.

But the position occupied by the majority of those who oppose Modernism is somewhat different. In their opinion Modernism not only will not work but is not true. And it is not true not in the first

instance because Modernist contentions can be refuted in open debate by reference to the available evidence, but because, as they contend, should the conclusions of Modernism ever come to be accepted by the ordinary man, he would not long succeed in remaining a Christian at all. This line of argument, though intelligible enough, is highly dangerous, inasmuch as it seeks to base the truth of Orthodoxy upon the alleged suitability of the diet which it offers to the mental and spiritual digestion of the man in the street, and the patent falsity of Modernism on the supposed inability of the same person to accept Modernist conclusions while retaining his belief in the essential truth of Christianity. The ordinary man, it is asserted, has a craving for hard facts and is suspicious of ideas; while he can appreciate plain alternatives, he cannot stomach the Modernist talk of truth which is merely 'relative'; while welcoming dogmatic assertions, cut-and-dried beliefs, religious infallibilities, he abhors the cautious utterances of the scholar, the carefully balanced distinctions of the theologian, the tiresome reservations of the critic, with his talk of sources, tendencies, authenticity and so on. And because of these preferences and antipathies of the ordinary man, we are assured that the only Christianity he can accept is a Christianity shorn of its problems, freed from all difficulties, and capable of wholesale assimilation without the faintest risk of spiritual or mental dyspepsia.

The logic of this position is somewhat alarming. It implies on the one hand that the ordinary man

is something of a fool, inasmuch as he is radically incapable of receiving any religious truth unless it is ladled out to him in the form of mental pap, a type of nourishment which reminds one instinctively of those palatable and widely advertised compositions of pre-digested food said to be so eminently suitable for infants and invalids; while on the other hand we are driven to accept the further implication that the New Testament scholar, who in his study of the Gospels meets with difficulties of interpretation or problems for faith, is something more of a fool inasmuch as, if the ordinary man is right, the supposed stumbling-blocks are wholly imaginary, the product merely of over-subtle intellects and barren disputations.

Such in effect is the position occupied by the Vice-Principal of Cuddesdon in the work already referred to. For him the story of the Virgin Birth is true not primarily because the evidence demands its acceptance, but because the ordinary man will not long continue to believe in an Incarnation if his faith is once deprived of the crutches which that story provides. So, again, the narratives which tell of the Empty Tomb are to be received as reliable, not in the first instance because the documentary testimony is alleged to be adequate, but rather on the ground that the ordinary man will speedily relinquish his belief in a living Christ if doubt is once cast upon the accepted mode of the Resurrection. Here is the head and front of the attack on Modernism, here the fundamental reason of its supposed unsuitability for assimilation by the man in the street.

In considering the 'all or nothing' character of this line of argument one cannot but recall the confident assertions of nineteenth century divines to the effect that if the historical character of the biblical Creation stories were once undermined the whole fabric of Christianity would tumble about our ears, since the ordinary man could no longer believe in a divinely governed universe if once its creation in six days were to be called in question. And one is tempted to ask further, How does the Traditionalist arrive at his conclusion that the measure of the unreasonableness of Christianity will be the measure of the ordinary man's ability to accept it? Or, if this form of the question be objected to, what precedent has he for the assertion, so often and so confidently made, that a presentation of Christianity which has already in point of fact helped thousands of men and women to a clearer and more rational faith will prove a universal stumbling-block to multitudes of simple believers, who must be spoon-fed and protected at all costs from the fatal perils of independent thinking if they are to escape damnation?

The Churchmen's Union, which exists in this country to maintain the cause of Truth, Freedom and Comprehensiveness in the Church of England, numbers among its members men and women of very diverse temperaments, of differing levels of education and culture, and engaged in a large variety of occupations. And yet I would make bold to affirm that for no single one of them does a belief in the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Jesus depend for a moment upon the stories of the Virgin

Birth and the Empty Tomb. As Librarian of the Union I receive frequent letters asking for books, or for advice as to a course of reading, or for guidance in the solution of this or that religious or theological difficulty. How many of my correspondents may I exclude from the ranks of 'ordinary people'? Where exactly will the Traditionalist have me draw the line between those who are able to accept the Modernist position without loss of essential faith, and those for whom the distinction between Fact and Mode must prove spiritually disastrous?

Again, as a parish priest both in town and country districts, I have for many years taught frankly and I hope constructively the Modernist interpretation of Christianity, and in the main the results have been without doubt encouraging. All my time as a parson has been spent among working class folk (the very people who, if we are to believe the Traditionalist, are constitutionally incapable of assimilating Modernist teaching), and yet when in Confirmation classes or informal conferences for men it has been possible to get a real insight into the true mind of one's hearers, almost without exception I have found people ready and even eager to listen to a Modernist presentation of the Christian Faith. It would no doubt be possible to talk a Modernist jargon which would prove as unintelligible and profitless as the sister jargon of the unimaginative Traditionalist. But one may claim that the essentials of the Modernist creed are at least as capable of a simple and direct presentation as the tenets of the most hide-bound Orthodoxy. The general feeling, in as far as I am able to gauge

it, is one of new-found freedom in a clearer and less stifling atmosphere where the winds of reality may blow at will. Men welcome the knowledge that Christian beliefs can be frankly discussed, that faith is not equivalent to a wholesale swallowing of a number of tabloid assertions, that it is never wrong to question a merely conventional presentation of religious truth, that the mind and not the heart only may be dedicated whole and entire to the service of God; they accept gladly the frankly given assertion that to most controversial questions there are two sides, each of which is worthy of understanding and respect, that the Modernist teacher is neither shocked at apparent unorthodoxy nor prone to suppress discussion in favour of a meek docility in face of authoritative pronouncements, that 'the essentials of religion are clear and luminous'; they experience a sensation not far removed from actual exhilaration at the knowledge that the New Testament portrait of God is alone authentic, that the Christ whom they are bidden to worship stands revealed in the Gospels as a living, human personality of flesh and blood, one whom they can understand and love and follow, who has no affinity with the vapid and unwholesome creations of modern ecclesiastical art.

Moreover, ought we not to expect intelligence, independence of judgment, capacity for the assimilation of new and living truth in men and women of many varying types and environments, and ought we not to stimulate and encourage these qualities wherever discovered? If Christ was right about human nature, if man as such 'is equipped for perfection,' if

those responsible for the secular education of our children frequently find their most promising pupils in the most unlikely quarters, why should we seek to confine Modernist teaching to the few, on the plea that the many cannot grasp its essential principles? If Modernism stands for 'the unification of thought,' is not that an ideal of which all alike can grasp the significance, from the untiring pursuit of which none can fail to profit? If the Modernist truly aims at thinking the thoughts and speaking the language of his own day, and yet at the same time keeping all that is essential in the religion of the past, is that an objective of which the most cautious Christian need feel ashamed, or from which the most simple-hearted disciple of the Master need recoil? Must we indeed see in Truth, Freedom, Simplification, Intelligibility, objects of desire which can make their appeal to the learned only? May we not rather claim that the desire for these things is universal, though often, it may be, inarticulate or ill expressed? And so claiming, must we not gladly admit that the Modernist has his contribution to make to the true interpretation of Christianity, and accordingly may stand free and unabashed within the boundaries of the Christian Church, working side by side with his Traditionalist brother for the honour of the one Christ?

The answer to these questions brings us face to face with the last problem with which we shall be concerned in this chapter—the problem of Modernist sincerity. The Modernist asserts alike the clear legitimacy and the imperative necessity of theological restatement. His study of the New Testament

assures him that the same right and the same necessity were fully recognised by the Evangelists themselves. He finds, for example, in Gospels and Epistles not one Christology but at the least three. He sees in the unknown writer of the Fourth Gospel the Modernist *par excellence*, the courageous interpreter of primitive Palestinian Christianity to the educated Gentile world at the end of the first century. While he regards the Johannine equation, Jesus is the Logos, as a Modernist *coup*, if the expression may be allowed, of unexampled audacity, he yet recognises to the full that the fourth Evangelist is essentially true to type in his manifest desire not merely to interpret the permanent significance of the historical Jesus, but to employ for the purposes of that interpretation the highest categories of thought available at the moment, on the ground that any categories less than the highest must prove palpably inadequate for so tremendous a task. Here the Modernist of the twentieth century stands resolutely in line with his great predecessor. Modernists recognise that the formula of Chalcedon left the door open for further research, and any restatement which may from time to time appear to be demanded will originate solely in the desire to follow the Johannine precedent, and to explain Jesus not merely in the current language of his own day, but in the highest terms available at any given period. With such a purpose the Traditionalist, theoretically at any rate, should have no cause to quarrel. If the Modernist is inclined on occasion to jettison time-honoured phrases, or to question the permanent value of some

earlier line of thought, it is always with a view to an increased adequacy of expression, never from the sense that previous interpreters of the Person of Jesus have set him in too high a place. Unless credal terminology is to be held sacrosanct for all time, there is nothing here to which the most rigid Traditionalist can rightly take exception.

But in actual fact the Modernist is met by the objection that his attempts at restatement (laudable and even essential as these may be in themselves) cause him not seldom to over-step the limits of legitimate re-interpretation, and to occupy on occasions at any rate a position which is actually equivalent not to the restatement of older doctrines but to their definite repudiation. The charge centres in the Modernist attitude towards the Virgin Birth, the Empty Tomb, and the so-called Nature Miracles of Jesus. Whatever may be thought of the Modernist's outlook on these matters, we may at least claim that his attitude is neither 'slippery' nor 'sophistical.' The Modernist has no desire to 'hedge'; he will say frankly what he believes, and exactly where his difficulties mainly lie. On the face of it, many clauses of the Creed must to-day be accepted symbolically merely and not literally if they are to make sense and retain their value for modern thought. But personally I am free to confess that in my judgment the language used with reference to the birth of Jesus or his resurrection is not capable of a symbolical interpretation in the sense in which the term symbolical can be applied to the language used to describe the Ascension or the descent into Hades. The fact

that for the original creed-makers all the clauses were accepted literally and not symbolically does not, in my opinion, materially affect the situation. For us at any rate (whatever the school of theological thought to which we belong) Descent and Ascension are alike figurative. On the other hand, to state the position crudely, Jesus either had a human father or he had not; his dead body either saw corruption in the tomb or it did not; just as he either fed five thousand people with five loaves, or stilled a storm, or walked on the sea, or he did not. If he did not do these things literally, it is surely an abuse of language to assert that he did them figuratively; if in reality he was the son of Joseph and Mary, the statement that symbolically he was born of a virgin is palpable nonsense; if the tomb in fact was not empty, it is the merest playing with words to declare that symbolically it was. So far, I think, the ordinary man is right, and the Traditionalist has a case. But what do these Modernist denials, even if categorically made, really amount to? At most they are denials not of the Fact but of the Mode, not of the essence of a belief, but of its form. As I have said, no Modernist seeks to question either the Incarnation or the presence (adequately guaranteed to the disciples) of the living Christ. And if the Traditionalist insists that his faith demands the double assurance of the Virgin Birth and the Empty Tomb, it is fair to reply that to an increasing number of thoughtful Christians, whose loyalty to Christ is passionate and unimpeachable, these very articles of the Creed (though neither the causes which produced

them nor the truths which they seek to illustrate are difficult of comprehension) are positive stumbling-blocks rather than aids to a more triumphant faith. Further, though in the case of the Nature Miracles the Modernist certainly inclines to the opinion that the element of the miraculous 'belongs not so much to the fact as to the telling,' have we in this belief anything which approximates even remotely to a denial of the Christian Faith? When robbed of the support once given to it by the figment of an infallible Bible, the Traditionalist case for compulsory belief falls to pieces.

When, therefore, the fullest allowance has been made for the negative features of the Modernist position, that position really amounts to this: While, to borrow some words of Dr. Sanday, it may be rightly said of us that we do not believe to-day all that the Church of the past has believed, yet we accept whole-heartedly all that the Church's faith has stood for. Surely Modernist *sincerity* at any rate cannot justly be impugned. And if the Modernist in any respect is wrong, his mind is not hermetically closed against the acceptance of new light and truth. He stands where he does because his search for truth has led him to his present position. The search continues, under the guidance, as he believes, of the living Christ; his loyalty to that Christ is enthusiastic and unimpaired—to his own Master he stands or falls; and if he claims the right to serve his Lord within the confines of the historic Church, is that claim one which the most ardent Traditionalist may lightly repudiate?

## Chapter II.

# The Child and the Higher Criticism.

'The Child and the Higher Criticism!' What in the world have these two to do with one another? Does not the word child call up in our minds a picture of sweet trustfulness, of guileless faith, of gentle submission to authority? And as for the critic, is he not a wild, lawless, headstrong person at best, and at worst the avowed enemy of the Faith, delighting in destruction, impatient of all restraint, one who rides roughshod over the most cherished beliefs, laying violent hands upon the spiritual treasures of simple souls? The conclusion would appear sufficiently obvious: keep the two as far as possible apart lest the simple faith of the child be shaken or destroyed by the assaults of infidelity!

And yet we cannot rest content with this summary decision, for the reason that the premises upon which it is based are radically false. The real child, in contrast to the pallid creations of the sentimental novelist, is for ever asking questions and striving to fathom the problems which life as he experiences it presents to him. It is true that at first he is apparently satisfied with any answers which his omniscient elders may think proper to furnish to his continual questions; but it is well to remember that those answers given thoughtlessly or in jest

will be taken in all seriousness by the child, stored up in his mind, and tested by the criterion of his own limited but ever widening experience.

A good example of the child's method is given in Sir Edmund Gosse's striking autobiography,—*Father and Son*. The matter of idolatry, which had been severly censured at a missionary meeting to which he had been taken, was much upon the mind of the seven-year-old boy. Mr. Gosse writes of himself as follows:

'I cross-examined my father very closely as to the nature of this sin, and pinned him down to the categorical statement that idolatry consisted in praying to anyone or anything but God Himself. Wood and stone, in the words of the hymn, were peculiarly liable to be bowed down to by the heathen in their blindness. I pressed my father further on the subject, and he assured me that God would be very angry, and would signify his anger, if anyone in a Christian country bowed down to wood and stone. I cannot recall why I was so pertinacious on this subject, but I remember that my father became a little restive under my cross-examination. I determined, however, to test the matter for myself, and one morning, when both my parents were safely out of the house, I prepared for the great act of heresy. I was in the morning-room on the ground floor, where with much labour I hoisted a small chair on to the table close to the window. My heart was now beating as if it would leap out of my side, but I pursued my experiment. I knelt down on the carpet in front of the table, and looking up I said my daily prayer in a loud voice, only substituting the address 'O Chair!' for the habitual one. Having carried this act of idolatry safely through, I waited to see what would happnen. It was a fine day, and I gazed up at the slip of white sky above the houses opposite and expected something to appear in it. God would

certainly exhibit His anger in some terrible form, and would chastise my impious and wilful action. I was very much alarmed, but still more excited; I breathed the high, sharp air of defiance. But nothing happened; there was not a cloud in the sky, not an unusual sound in the street. Presently I was quite sure that nothing would happen. I had committed idolatry, flagrantly and deliberately, and God did not care. The result of this ridiculous act was not to make me question the existence and power of God; these were forces which I did not dream of ignoring. But what it did was to lessen still further my confidence in my father's knowledge of the divine mind. My father had said positively, that if I worshipped a thing made of wood, God would manifest His anger. I had then worshipped a chair, made, or partly made, of wood, and God had made no sign whatever. My father, therefore, was not really acquainted with the divine practice in cases of idolatry.'

Does not this story serve to prove that the child acting according to his nature, endeavours to arrive at the truth as far as he is capable of understanding it, and will be satisfied with nothing less? But the aim of the critic is precisely the same. The sole object of his researches is the discovery of the truth. To that search he brings whatever qualifications he may possess. The critic of Old or New Testament is committed to the most rigorous examination of his sources, not in the spirit of wanton destruction, but that he may learn from them all that they have to tell of the beliefs and incidents in which he is interested. The critic, like the child, wants to get to the bottom of everything which lies within the range of his researches. He refuses to be put off with anything less than the truth; he cannot simply accept the explanations

of others, but desires to test them by the standards of his own knowledge and experience. Believing that the truest is the best, he can go forward unafraid, confident that no discovery can ultimately destroy a faith which is built upon the foundation of truth.

Now it is clear that the child who asks questions will sooner or later ask them about the Bible. And it should be clear further that the biblical critic who gives his life to its study is the best person from whom the child may receive information. Both child and critic are for ever asking questions; the supreme object of both is the discovery of truth; it must surely follow that the critic who has gone a little further along the path of discovery is in a position to give a helping hand to the youthful investigator. What then becomes of the advice: Keep the two as far as possible apart lest the simple faith of the child be shaken or destroyed by the assaults of infidelity?

It has become unfashionable even for the parochial clergy to try to withstand altogether the conclusions of biblical scholars. Certain well-established results of criticism are now fairly widely accepted, at least with reference to the Old Testament. Many clergy extend a sort of patronising welcome to such results as can be made to square somehow with the supposed demands of orthodoxy; for we all like to be considered broad-minded and abreast of the times. But when it comes to the beliefs of their congregations, whether children or adults, the matter assumes a different complexion.

The parson, whether as teacher of a class or in

the pulpit, seems seldom able to speak naturally to his hearers. He would seem to be perpetually haunted by the dread lest by speaking frankly and simply he may unsettle the faith of some pious member of his congregation, or sow the seeds of doubt in the soul of a child. His sense of loyalty to the particular party in the Church to which he happens to belong makes him afraid to admit that to most questions there are two sides. His whole attitude is but too often an expression of the belief that if people are allowed to think for themselves they will inevitably think wrong. I believe that some such conviction lies at the root of much of the clerical unwillingness to speak frankly to congregations of the new knowledge in regard to the Bible which criticism has given us. And yet there can be no doubt that inestimable harm is being done to the cause of religion by this conspiracy of silence.

'Let the Church but get hold of the children and all will be well,' is a favourite formula to-day. The children, it is said, are the Church's greatest asset, for the children of to-day will be the men and women of to-morrow—a profound remark which never fails to win applause at clerical meetings. With the aim of 'getting hold of the children' there has arisen within the Church of England a marked tendency in favour of early Confirmations. The clergy seem to feel that the one hope is to get the child confirmed at the earliest possible age, and before he is old enough to do much thinking for himself. A cynical observer might perhaps suggest that the almost feverish eagerness with

which Confirmation is urged upon the child betokens a somewhat half-hearted belief in the reasonableness of the Church's claims.

The insistence upon what is called definite Church teaching in day and Sunday school alike points the same way. The pre-supposition in both cases seems to be the same: unless you can get the child when he is young and imbue him with the particular theories which you wish him to adopt, and that so thoroughly as to prevent any subsequent effort on his part either to think for himself or to look at a question from more than one point of view, you can never hope to influence him at all.

Such a policy is not attractive, nor is it even successful. It is one thing to present child candidates for Confirmation, and quite another to retain them as regular and intelligent communicants. It is comparatively easy to keep up the numbers of a Sunday school, and even to obtain seemingly satisfactory results in the shape of mechanically given answers and carefully written analyses of Church doctrine. But the real test comes when the boy or girl leaves Sunday school and goes out to work. The alarming leakage which occurs between Sunday school and Bible class is too well known to require comment; the sudden loss of keenness on the part of large numbers of boys and girls at the age of fourteen or fifteen is a phenomenon only too common. Again, the high percentage of 'lapsed' communicants, and the comparative indifference to organised religion displayed by thousands of young men and young women who have been 'brought up to the Church,'

points to the same conclusion: the Church, by its present method of teaching, has failed in the main to keep the allegiance of those who are old enough to think for themselves. The few who remain within the Church's fellowship are but too often narrow and prejudiced in their outlook, content to accept conviction as the test of truth, alike unable and unwilling to see the other side of a question, rejoicing in cant phrases and party catchwords; while the great majority are either wholly lacking in enthusiasm for Church teaching or in many cases definitely hostile to Christianity as they understand it.

If then it be true that the Church has failed, where are we to look for mistakes, and what sort of remedy is required?

In the first place, it is undoubtedly true that as things stand at present the young man has definitely to unlearn much that as a child he has been taught to believe. In the great majority of cases the narratives of the Old Testament are presented to him as the record of actual events which occurred exactly as they are described. In all probability the clergyman who is responsible for the children's service, and quite possibly some of the teachers, have at least a rudimentary idea of the process by which the Old Testament has reached its present form, but it seems to be tacitly understood that such knowledge must at all costs be withheld from the children. The result is inevitable. The child, even while he is still at day-school, detects contradictions between the science of the Bible and what he is taught during the week; and as he grows up

and learns to think for himself, he becomes increasingly conscious of the impossibility of squaring the stories of the Old Testament with facts, of the truth of which he is assured on other grounds. Inevitably, therefore, he throws over the Old Testament as a book of fables, and with it goes in all probability belief in the New Testament and the teaching of the Church.

Let us take as an example the story of the Flood. Only too often, following the guidance of Sunday school hand-books, the teacher presents the story in detail as a precise record of actual happenings, and emphasis is laid throughout on the direct action of God in the events described. By this method it is hardly likely that the child will gain either any noble conception of God, or any adequate impression of the divine love. We can scarcely wonder at the London boy's definition of God as ''im what drowned all the world one day, and is going to burn it up another.' But as likely as not worse will follow. I have myself heard the promise of God to Noah definitely linked with Christ's promise of the Comforter in the Fourth Gospel. By this means the primitive conceptions of the divine actions and character preserved in Jewish folklore were inseparably connected in the mind of the child with the ways of God as they have been revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. The resulting picture of God must necessarily be chaotic, and therefore misleading.

The danger of so presenting the story that the child is asked to accept wholesale the most glaring improbabilities, about which, if he is not too

apathetic, he is bound to make searching enquiries, is well illustrated by the sort of questions put by his Zulu hearers to Bishop Colenso in the same connection. The Bishop writes: 'While translating the story of the Flood, I have had a simple-minded but intelligent native—one with the docility of a child but the reasoning powers of mature age—look up and ask, "Is all that true? Do you really believe that all this happened thus—that all the beasts and birds and creeping things upon the earth, large and small, from hot countries and cold, came thus by pairs and entered into the ark with Noah? And did Noah gather food for them all, for the beasts and birds of prey as well as for the rest?" My heart answered in the words of the prophet: "Shall a man speak lies in the name of the Lord?" I dared not do so.' Yet it would seem that many religious teachers to-day have no such scruples!

Surely if this story is to be taught to children at all, it must be made clear to them at the outset that it is in fact legend and not history. Let them be told that the story as we have it is made up of two separate narratives, dating from different periods and irreconcilable as regards details. Encourage them to find out for themselves the points of difference in the two accounts; tell them something of the old Babylonian flood story written on clay tablets at least seven thousand years ago, and of the labours of scholars in deciphering the quaint characters in which it was inscribed. Make them understand that while the story does not speak of God as we think of Him to-day, it yet

represents a great advance upon the crude polytheism of the Babylonian epic. Explain that science has proved that no such universal flood has ever taken place, and that tales of great floods are found in the folklore of many races. Above all, make it abundantly clear that only gradually have men learned to know God as He has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ, driving home the elementary but still much-neglected truth that every picture of God, whether within the Old Testament or outside it, must be judged by the portrait of his Father offered for our acceptance by Jesus of Nazareth. By this means the child's interest will have been aroused, he will have obtained an understanding of the Old Testament which will help him to appraise it at its true worth, and there will exist in his mind no confusion between the teaching of the Bible and the knowledge gained in class-room or laboratory.

It follows from this single example that the one hope of making the Old Testament a help and not a stumbling-block to the child of to-day is to teach it from the point of view of the Higher Criticism, which merely means that the child must be taught to regard the Old Testament as a literature, not as a single book, that he must be provided with a simply presented conception of its origin and character, together with a clear grasp of its relation to the events of secular history, and that above all he must be guided to the acceptance of a view of inspiration which does not equate it with infallibility, and must learn to recognise a progressive advance from lower to higher forms of religious belief. In this way the child will be trained to exercise

his own judgment in the effort to distinguish between the permanent and the transitory elements in the teaching of the Old Testament. If it be objected that such an ideal is too ambitious and beyond the scope of the child's intelligence, it may be replied that the attempt to teach the Old Testament on frankly modern lines has been already made, and with eminently encouraging results.

Now it is still unfortunately the case that the great majority of children are simply bored by the whole Sunday school procedure; and where there is no interest it is impossible to achieve good results. In many schools the lessons are carefully prepared, and the teachers eager to do all that they can, and yet, more often then not, the children are either furtively fidgeting, if they are girls, or volubly inattentive, if they are boys; while in all probability the same children would on a week-day prove sufficiently interested in what they were taught. If we look for the reason of this difference of atmosphere in day and Sunday school, we may find it partly at any rate in a divergence of method. In what is termed secular education it is coming increasingly to be recognised that the old method of storing the child's mind with a quantity of unrelated facts, the potential value of which may become apparent as he grows older, but in which at the moment he takes not the smallest interest, is fundamentally mistaken. To-day the child is called upon to think for himself, and to accept as little as possible upon the bare authority of his teachers; the aim of those responsible for his education being so to train his mind as to enable

him to solve along right lines the many problems with which in adult life he must inevitably be confronted. To this end he is encouraged to exercise his own judgment, and to look always at both sides of a question. The problems presented to him are carefully graded, so that on the one hand he is never discouraged by the difficulty of his task, while on the other interest is stimulated and effort elicited by the joy of reaching forward to new results.

Contrast this with the type of teaching the child normally receives in church or Sunday school. Here the old false methods still largely prevail. For the most part the evil practice of packing the child's mind with unnecessary details of Old Testament history goes on unchecked. The Sunday school offers but scant encouragement to independence of judgment; if an event is recorded in the Bible it must be accepted without further argument; if some things are difficult, the teacher can always fall back upon the necessity for faith—that useful capacity, as someone has defined it, of believing what we know to be untrue! For example, an English child, ignorant of the flat roofs of Eastern houses, asks how St. Peter was able to go to sleep on the roof without falling off; the teacher, scenting incipient scepticism, promptly replies, 'My child, with God all things are possible.' Many will doubtless recognise the tendency illustrated by this extreme case, to apply to the interpretation of the Bible methods which no one would dream of employing with reference to other literature.

The natural desire of the religious teacher to

put the Bible upon a level of its own not infrequently leads to results far other than those expected. If the uniqueness of the Bible be perpetually insisted upon, the child, while giving at first a formal assent to the proposition, will inevitably grow weary of its repetition, and in consequence run no small risk of failing to discover for himself wherein the uniqueness actually lies. Surely it is far wiser to allow the books of the Old Testament to be studied in the same way as other literature is studied, and so to give to their highest teaching an opportunity of making its own natural and unforced impression upon the child's mind.

It must be said further that the very familiarity of the Bible is not seldom a stumbling-block in the way of its appreciation by the average child. Its stories are, superficially at least, familiar; the fact that they are in the Bible makes the child accept them as a matter of course, while at the same time destroying in great part his interest in them. The failure of many Sunday schools to adapt both the matter and method of the lesson to the varying ages and capacities of the pupils reduces the possibility of obtaining satisfactory results almost to a minimum; while the small scope usually given to the children for self-expression means on the one hand that the child has little chance of assimilating what he has been taught, and on the other that no opportunity is afforded to the teacher of testing the impression made upon the mind of the child by what he has tried to teach. The introduction both of grading and of expression work must be regarded as an essential preliminary to

any real reform of the Sunday school at the present day.

It is in the teaching of the New Testament, and especially of the life of Jesus, that failure has been most glaringly apparent. What has been said of Bible teaching in general stands doubly true with regard to the Gospels. Clergy and teachers alike are terribly afraid of allowing the children freedom to form their own impressions of the central figure; they seem obsessed by the belief that if a child is left to himself he will fail in appreciation of Jesus; hence they seize every opportunity of impressing upon the child's mind that this Jesus is the divine Son of God. The intention may be admirable, but it cannot be denied that the result achieved is frequently disastrous. The method employed confronts the child at the outset with a figure which, to him at any rate, appears unnatural, and therefore unattractive. To seek to force a boy to accept your own conclusions, however gentle the suasion which is brought to bear, is to run no small risk of creating in him the desire to think otherwise. Surely it is both safer and more reverent to follow the example of Jesus himself, and to allow the children to form their own estimate of who he was by a study of his life unencumbered as far as may be by any elaborate apparatus of theological pre-suppositions. To insist on his divinity from the outset is to begin at the wrong end, and to run the risk of thwarting any genuine appreciation of his human life. If we make Jesus unreal to the child by a forced and premature insistence upon his divinity, the

inevitable outcome is loss of interest. 'Jesus divinest when thou most art man' is true for the child as for the adult—a fact upon which the clergy and religious teachers generally would do well to reflect. No punctilious correctness of doctrine can compensate for the failure to present Jesus Christ to men in all the glory of his true humanity.

Every child will create for himself his hero, whose actions and character he will strive to make his own. Beyond doubt the first duty of the religious teacher is so to portray the life and character of Jesus Christ as to call forth enthusiastic admiration and whole-hearted loyalty. Jesus must be 'Jesus the Hero' if he is to hold the first place in the child's heart; his life of ceaseless activity and splendid achievement must be the ideal upon which the child's own efforts and aspirations shall be allowed to centre. Abstract propositions about the significance of the death of Christ, detailed explanations as to his relationship to God are, where the child is concerned, so much waste of time. The goal of all religious teaching should be the creation of the Christlike character. People have need of an ideal at once absolutely simple as regards its intellectual expression, so that the humblest may apprehend its meaning; and infinitely splendid in its spiritual content, so that the noblest may find in the effort to achieve it the satisfaction of their highest aspirations.

Privilege without responsibility is impossible. The religious teacher, unless he is to betray his trust, is bound to proclaim the truth as he conceives it, and in the form in which it may be most readily

understood by those whom he is called to teach. In his search for truth he must learn to welcome all new knowledge even when it comes from unlikely sources. To one engaged on so high a work fresh discoveries and the unbiassed sifting of evidence can bring no fear. Biblical scholars have thrown a flood of fresh light upon the meaning of the Bible. It is for them to recognise that their work is carried on not merely in the interest of the experts, but for the sake of all Christian people. The results of their researches must be given to ordinary folk, expressed in terms which ordinary folk can understand; and clergy and teachers alike are bound to see to it that their hearers, whether children or adults, are encouraged to think intelligently, and to profit by the best that is being said and written to-day by the leaders of religious thought.

# Chapter III.

## God and the Schoolboy.

It is a commonplace to-day that the ideas which many people have about God are confused and unsatisfactory. The War served only to emphasise a situation in part already apparent. And among the multitude of distracted seekers after a God whom they could love and understand were included a large proportion of so-called instructed church-people, whose second-hand convictions and unassimilated smatterings of 'nursery theology' failed altogether to stand the strain of a direct, and as it seemed to many, an overwhelming challenge to faith.

The majority seemed frankly ignorant, and without any clear understanding of the divine character. In one form or another the question, 'What is God like?' was asked with growing insistence, and as many chaplains have testified, there existed in the mind of the average man a quite definite contradiction between the sort of behaviour to be expected from God on the one hand, and the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth on the other. In many cases the answers given by the official interpreters of the divine character were rejected as unsatisfactory. Men did not like the thing presented to them as Christianity; Christian orthodoxy appeared un-Christlike, and confusion

reigned supreme. The really vital problems remained unsolved. What was God's attitude to war? Did God send the war as a punishment? If war was evil, why did not God stop it? If a man was killed in battle, what happened next? How would God treat the sinner? And if there was a heaven, was it a place where the ordinary man could feel at ease? If people suffered, was God sorry about it, or was He simply indifferent? Was it any use to pray? Did prayer keep you safe in battle? And did God give victory to the nation which prayed most or to the side with the biggest battalions? These questions, and many more to the same effect, sprang one and all from a radical failure to understand the ways of God, from a disastrous confusion between the savage tribal deity revealed in the more primitive narratives of the Old Testament, and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Out of the manifold evil of the war there has come at least this one good, that the poverty and inherent contradictions of the ordinary man's faith in God have become more adequately recognised. We are told by no less an authority than the Archbishop of Canterbury that 'the supreme need of our nation is a new understanding of God's character,' that 'in vast stretches of the nation the thought of God is barely Christian,' and that in consequence 'a living theology' is the most pressing necessity of our age. With the Primate's diagnosis of the situation few will disagree; but men may well ask, 'How comes it that in a country where for centuries Christ has been proclaimed as

Lord it can still be maintained that the thought of God in the minds of millions of ordinary people is in fact 'barely Christian'? The men and women who during the war years were asking in fierce challenge or in vague bewilderment, 'What is God like?' were the children of a few years ago, and a large proportion of them at any rate had attended the Sunday schools of one or other of the denominations, and had received at least some degree of religious instruction in church or chapel. And yet on the fundamental question of the character of God consistent thinking was seldom if ever discoverable. Of all the charges laid rightly or wrongly at the door of the Churches to-day none surely is more damning or more well-founded than this, that the nation to which they minister was called upon to face the supreme crisis of its history equipped with a thought of God which can be adequately described by the Primate of the national Church as 'barely Christian.'

In face of a failure so overwhelming there is little room for denominational acrimony, for where all must plead guilty the task of apportioning the blame loses something of its flavour. Clergy, ministers, Sunday school teachers are alike responsible, and cannot afford to call one another hard names. But with the old cry, 'The children, the Church's hope' still ringing in our ears, it behoves us to look to the present, to take stock of our resources, to ask ourselves whether as teachers we are fit for the work with which we are entrusted. If the Church 'gets' the children, how shall it teach them aright? What prospect is there that

the boys and girls taught in our Sunday schools to-day will gain a truer, clearer, more Christian picture of God than that offered to the generation which fought in the late war? If we are clergy, ministers, teachers or parents the answer depends on us. And there is a clear need to discuss alike with candour and with hope the causes of past failure and the conditions of future success.

Among the causes of past failure we must give the first place to a wrong method of teaching the Bible. Facts for facts' sake is still the guiding principle of much so-called religious education to-day. The children are regarded as 'pint-pots to be filled up.' No attempt is made to distinguish between degrees of historical probability, ethical worth or spiritual value. 'As a boy is taught (and taught only means told) that Jamaica is or is not of importance because figs are or are not grown there, so he is taught or told that there are ten plagues or twelve tribes, and that David and Timothy were both good men.' In the thought of many a devout Sunday school teacher faith is confused with the most wholesale credulity, and the child, compelled to suppress his God-given faculties of critical judgment and intelligent discrimination, settles down into an attitude of stolid indifference, accepts all statements, however intrinsically improbable, as true 'because they are in the Bible and you have got to believe them,' and so learns at the outset to sacrifice his power of independent thinking, thus putting himself at the mercy of every religious quack and charlatan with a persuasive tongue, and a gift of emphatic

reiteration almost hypnotic in its mind-lulling effects.

On the other hand it not infrequently happens that the Bible teaching received by the child in the day school is equally harmful in its results, though from a different cause. Here the Scripture lesson takes its place merely as part of the term's curriculum. Each term a certain amount of ground has to be covered. So many verses must be committed to memory, so many stories must be mechanically absorbed in order that their details may be subsequently disgorged at the bidding of the examiner. Time is short, and the teacher, however conscientious, is heavily handicapped. In many cases he is painfully aware of his own lack of qualifications for the task laid on his shoulders. Consequently he works at best in a spirit of resolute but uninspired determination to get the necessary facts driven into the children's minds, while at worst his temper is one of thinly veiled dislike of the whole business, a temper which his class are uncannily quick to detect and to assimilate. The position is little short of desperate. The few teachers really qualified for their task by both knowledge and enthusiasm feel themselves hampered by the syllabus and by an attitude of suspicion and hostility (real or supposed) on the part of managers and parents towards modern methods of teaching the Bible. The great majority, while by no means hostile to religion, are totally unfitted to teach the Bible intelligently, and in consequence the instruction received by the children is either fantastic or perfunctory. Where the teacher is

himself puzzled or bored by his subject, the effect on his pupils will be not dissimilar. In those cases in which the teacher frankly disbelieves all that he is called upon to teach, the children will quickly form the impression that certain things which must be regarded as true for the purpose of the Scripture lesson, for life as a whole may be set aside as false. Such a point of view must ultimately lead either to thoroughgoing scepticism, or to the hopeless and irrational attempt to divide the mind into compartments, labelled respectively Sacred and Secular, Sunday and Week-day—an attempt which can result in nothing else than the complete and utter shipwreck of all intelligent belief.

But questions connected with the historical reliability of the biblical narratives do not present the only—nor indeed the main—problem for the religious teacher at the present time. It is the ethical and spiritual confusion consequent upon faulty methods of teaching the Bible which has done more than anything else to render impossible for the majority of men any clear and intelligent conception of the character of God. Until the child is helped to grasp the obvious fact that the Bible is not a book but a library; that all the pictures of God contained in that library are not equally true; that some are frankly un-Christian, and therefore false; that the truth of every picture must be rigorously tested by the portrait of God presented to us in Jesus Christ, his mind will remain in a condition of muddle from which there is no escape, religion will be divorced from life, and his ideas of God will be chaotic, hazy, departmental,

or even definitely repulsive, positively harmful to his religious development.

Despite discouragement, even small children think much more than their teachers suppose, and the following examples given by Miss Hetty Lee, Sunday School Organiser for the National Society, shew a vigour and acuteness of ethical judgment as yet unspoiled by the be-fogged and be-fogging platitudes of conventional religious teaching. On being told that as a punishment for eating the apple Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden, one child cried out, 'How cruel of God! I expect God wanted it for Himself, didn't He?' Another, after listening to the story of the Flood, exclaimed, in a rather pathetic attempt to save God's face, 'God wouldn't have drowned them in the flood if He had thought about it, would He, teacher?' And yet another, half-conscious perhaps of some New Testament story setting forth the love of the divine Father, hazarded the suggestion, 'God has improved since then, hasn't He, teacher?' In one case quoted by Miss Lee in the same article, a child repudiated with scorn the picture of God offered for her admiration, exclaiming vehemently, 'I love Jesus, but I hate God.' There is an instance in early childhood (the children to whom Miss Lee refers were all under eight) of that sharp distinction, so manifestly present in the minds of many soldiers, between a loving Christ, endowed with the qualities most readily admired by the ordinary man, and a hard, aloof, indifferent and (so to say) official God. A child of my own, having heard for the first time

the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac, made the following entirely unprompted comment: 'Well, I'm sure that story can't be true. God is so kind and loving He would never tease Abraham like that!' Is it not possible that the immediate rejection of the story by this small five-year-old sceptic was a thing of truer worth than the glib acceptance of anything and everything for the sole reason that 'it's in the Bible and so we've got to believe it'?

Experience shews that day school children will recite with equal fluency details from the story of the slaughter of the Amalekites—a deed of barbaric cruelty expressly said to have been undertaken at the divine command, and a parable of matchless beauty like that of the Prodigal Son, without apparently the faintest consciousness of having passed from an atmosphere in which acts of brutal savagery can be thought of as prompted by the vengeful temper of a national deity, to a level of spiritual perception where God is recognised as the loving Father of the individual, eagerly welcoming the return of His wayward child. Until the teacher is able to grasp and to emphasise the obvious disparity in ethical and spiritual value between the two stories, amounting in reality to so radical a contradiction that if the one is true the other must be false, we cannot hope that the teaching of the Bible will prove of much benefit to those by whom it is received.

The question has been recently asked by a writer in a progressive Sunday school magazine, 'Can we really train our children in worship through our carefully planned services, if He whom they are

asked to worship is to them so unbeautiful?' That question is terribly pertinent, and assuredly we have no shadow of right to leave unnecessary stumbling-blocks in the path of the growing child. It is our clear duty to study the Bible with the help of the best scholarship available, and to treat boys and girls not as 'pint-pots to be filled up' with a confused jumble of misleading statements, but as intelligent beings worthy to receive at our hands the truth in that form best fitted to their understanding.

If the Bible badly taught produces on the part of the child at best a tendency to apologise for God, and at worst frank and open expressions of disgust and hatred, it must be admitted that the majority of children's hymns are largely responsible for that prevailing sense of unreality, and not seldom of positive mawkishness, which attaches in the mind of the ordinary man to all matters connected with religion. The evil wrought by hymns of a sickly type has been emphasised by Dr. Herbert Gray in a small book, *As Tommy sees us*, published during the War, and worth its weight in gold. 'Where,' he says, 'did our young men get the notion that religion is a sickly thing? Where did they get their disastrous misconceptions of Jesus? Whence came their common impression that a Christian is a prig?' And he adds, 'It really would seem that in the composition and selection of children's hymns the sentimentalist has let himself go . . . It would seem to be the fate of middle-aged people that they *will* use children, when they can, as playthings. And in connection with religion

they have used them to provide pleasing sensations for themselves.'

Dr. Gray is a Presbyterian, and cites instances from the *Church Hymnary*, but the Anglican reader will have no difficulty in finding a host of similar examples in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. Surely a Friend 'above the bright blue sky' does not meet the need of a child, who should learn rather of the presence of the living Christ here and now. Again, the promise of crowns and robes and harps in some future world of palpable unrealities has no attraction for the average healthy boy concerned with the business of developing both mind and muscles for effective use in the only world with which he has first-hand acquaintance. Nor does he care to regard himself as a 'little pilgrim,' whose sole desire is to 'rest eternally.' To rest is indeed about the last thing that he wants to do. Life for him is emphatically *not* a 'desert dry and dreary,' nor can he be naturally conscious of any 'death to die for Jesus' sake,' of any 'weary war to wage with sin.' It is true of course that these hymns have endeared themselves to many adults by the power of association, and true also that very young children can sing them for a time at least with no oppressive sense of unreality. But the restlessness of the adolescent at children's services too often tells its own tale. Why should the growing boy (the most sensitive creature alive) be asked to describe himself as 'weak and sinful' just at the moment when he is most acutely aware of the presence of new powers, of undreamed of capacities to be used lavishly and without stint in the service

of the highest? Why, again, should we invite him to picture himself as 'a lamb,' or urge him to direct his thoughts to heaven as a place where he will be permitted to rest for ever in the arms of Christ?

On one occasion at a meeting of a Sunday School Association a lady teacher took me severely to task for my temerity in venturing to question the suitability of certain hymns. Having shown that robes, harps and crowns were objects of supreme desire to the child-mind, she concluded, amid tumultuous applause, by asking the question, 'What boy does not hope to be a king?' Altogether apart from a not unjustifiable conviction that the hope is doomed to be disappointed, I must still confess myself wholly and obstinately unrepentant. As Herbert Gray points out, far too many hymns for the young are concerned with heaven, and a bad heaven at that—'a place of inane occupations,' with no legitimate attractions for a normal boy. Someone has suggested, flippantly perhaps, yet with a sure instinct for truth, that 'if (as Wordsworth taught) Heaven lies about us in our infancy, that is no reason why we should lie about heaven when we grow up.' It is to be feared that many hymn writers have disregarded this sound advice, and in consequence the child's thought of God has lacked coherence and reality.

We can find a third cause of failure in the predominance of what may be termed a Theology of Fear. While it is no doubt the case that the old 'hell-fire' theology is to-day seldom proclaimed formally from the pulpit, and while (in natural

reaction from the harsh temper of a cruel creed) God is sometimes presented as a being of easy-going and comprehensive benevolence, who can be relied upon to forgive, because forgiveness (as Heine put it) is God's business, yet it remains true that the thought of God in the mind of the average child consists, in about equal proportions, of feelings compounded of negative bewilderment and of positive fear.

A class of adolescent girls recently propounded to their teacher the following grisly problem: 'If our bodies die, how are we going to feel the flames when we get into hell?' When the teacher had explained the meaning of hell along lines less crudely materialistic, there came the immediate response: 'Well, if hell isn't like that—everlasting fires and all, why do they teach us it in school?' But too often evil is presented to the child in the guise of a personal malign presence about his path and about his bed. A well-known children's hymn contains the rather comfortless information: 'There's a wicked spirit watching round you still,' and the popular conception of God's all-seeing eye leaves on the mind the same disconcerting impression of being constantly watched—an impression which effectively prevents all possibility of a joyous and health-giving fellowship with the divine Father. One of two things must inevitably happen: either the hazily conceived picture of a benevolent God is less real to the child than the vividly portrayed figure of a personal devil, who (like Milton's Satan) may stand out as the actual hero among the characters on his theological stage: or God Himself,

in as far as He finds a definite place in the child's thought at all, is apt to take on some of the unpleasing characteristics of His supposed rival.

There is enough here to account for the picture of God printed indelibly on the mind of many a soldier as a being unpleasantly expert in the detection of misdemeanours, and for the common impression of religion as primarily an affair of 'Don'ts.' God may be thought of as inhabiting a remote heaven, but the divine sight and the divine hearing are believed to be remarkably acute, and many who as children had dinned into them the idea of God as a sort of celestial policeman have not lost their uneasy dread of Him even in adult life. In the minds of countless boys the thought of God is inseparably connected with the picture of a recording angel, undeniably competent at his business, who notes down their doings with a meticulous accuracy and painstaking elaboration of detail distressing to contemplate. It is perhaps scarcely probable that ideas of this kind will provide any adequate foundation upon which to build in later years the structure of a reasonable faith.

Finally, the Church's failure is due in part at any rate to the pitiable confusion which exists in the minds of the majority of professing Christians as to the scope, purpose and practical effects of prayer. Popular ideas about prayer, which have entrenched themselves so securely in the minds of many adults that the most persuasive exposition of the truth fails altogether to dislodge them, are directly traceable to bad teaching given in childhood. Many think of God mainly as a kind of universal

provider who can supply any need, if only He can be persuaded to do so. For such people prayer becomes a sort of sanctified cajolery, and God is pictured in the guise of a despotic sultan, a creature of whims and caprices, whose refusal to grant a request is due to no motive more exalted than that of arbitrary disinclination. For many, again, prayer is conceived of as primarily magical; God is the great Magician, and the business of those who pray is to discover the correct formula, by recourse to which the divine thaumaturgy may be induced to function on their behalf. As Mr. Studdert Kennedy has impressed upon us, the belief in prayer as a sort of Aladdin's Lamp is still terribly dominant. When lamp-rubbing failed during the War, and the one prayed for did not return, many gave up prayer as useless and lost faith in God.

It should surely be obvious that to think of prayer solely as a means to secure personal benefits is selfish, unintelligent and dishonouring to God. That way lies perplexity, disillusionment, and ultimate despair. To ask God to turn aside a bullet from its appointed course is to ask Him to do magic on our behalf. Such a prayer God cannot answer. To suppose that He can but will not, leads either to the desperate conviction that God is cruel, or to the profitless attempt to save God's face by reference to His inscrutable wisdom, a reference which carries with it the implied assertion that the divine actions are unaccountable and capricious. Rather let us teach prayer as fellowship with a loving God, as adventurous dedication to the Father's will, as the source of power to face every

happening in the heroic spirit of Jesus Christ; and by so doing save the child from mistaken and unworthy ideas of the divine methods—ideas which must lead inevitably to confusion and disaster.

Now if it be indeed true that 'in vast stretches of the nation the thought of God is barely Christian,' and if we were right in finding the primary cause of this calamity in a wrong method of teaching the Bible, it is true no less that the three subsidiary reasons which have been suggested to account for the Church's failure are all intimately connected with this one radical defect. A Bible wrongly understood and mechanically used must be held accountable for the presence in the minds of the majority of ordinary men and women of a picture of God which is 'barely Christian.' To faulty methods of Bible teaching we owe our crop of sentimental children's hymns, in which the imaginative fancies of oriental symbolism have been translated into the language of cold fact and prosaic assertion by the unintelligent verse-makers of the West. The same faulty methods are responsible also for the confused and childish theology of the man in the street, to whose mind God is presented now as a being of vague and indiscriminate benevolence, now in a light so patently unattractive that for practical purposes He appears as our enemy rather than our friend. And finally, the same methods must be held answerable for a debased view of prayer, which would drag man's intercourse with God down to the sordid levels of bribery and magic.

What, then, it will be asked, is the obvious remedy

to be applied to so desperate a situation? By what means can the child's thought of God be brought nearer to the truth? I answer unhesitatingly that the remedy lies in adopting consistently the method of the New Testament writers themselves, and presenting God to the child—His character, His actions, His purposes—in terms of Jesus Christ. If St. Paul was right, and Christ is 'the portrait of the invisible God,' then by following this clue unswervingly it should be possible both to destroy misunderstandings, and to create in the child's mind a picture of God which will call forth all the love and admiration which boys and girls know how to lavish unstintingly on the objects of their spontaneous affection.

From those whom he loves, the child looks for love in return. And the love which he demands has in it no element of sickly sentiment; it is not a thing of fits and starts and moods, but a sturdy all-weather affection, which includes respect, sympathy, understanding, interest. It is a love too which does not fluctuate according to the measure of the child's good behaviour, but which manifests itself 'not only when you're good, but when you're naughty as well.' Such a love will express itself in the wish to be just and to play fair even in little things; it must be incapable of spying, or of taking any mean advantage; it must exhibit a sense of proportion, and a capacity, where needful, to distinguish intelligently between act and motive. This love, moreover, will try to see the child's world through the child's eyes; it will trust to the furthest limits of possibility; it will be intelligible

in its demands, and not less intelligible in its chastisements. Again, this real love, which the child craves, will be creative of a true comradeship; where there is a call to service or adventure, its word will be 'Come,' not merely 'Go'; it will be a love which neither accepts bribes nor gives them; a love swift to forgive, prodigal of sacrifice, ever appealing to the highest which the child can understand.

A love so expressed will never fail to win response. It sets forth an ideal high and difficult of attainment, yet one which has received perfect fulfilment in Jesus Christ. As we contemplate the love of Christ we see there the attitude of God our Father to each one of His children, big and little alike. Let a man once grasp the truth of God in Christ, and there is revealed to him a way of thinking about God which the simplest child can make his own, and the wisest among us can never hope to exhaust; for (in the words of the Johannine Christ) 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'

## Chapter IV.

# The Dangers of an Infallible Bible.

In this chapter we are to consider the attitude of the average churchgoer towards the Bible. Our concern, that is to say, will be not with the man in the street who prides himself on his emancipation from the restraints and prejudices of an outworn religion, for whom Christianity is a fairy tale, and the Bible a collection of fables, but with the man in the pew who, sharing the attitude of the late Dr. Pusey expressed in a well known hymn, views with alarm the spectacle of the hungry billows curling round the ark of God, watches apprehensively the unfurling of higher critical banners, and the hurling by the abhorred Modernist of envenomed darts dipped in the subtle poison of unbelief. If it be found that the point of view of church-going orthodoxy is compounded of an odd mixture of uncritical acceptance, last ditch conservativism, and stolid opposition to new ideas, we shall have to ask what are the causes which have led to so disastrous a situation, what are its more obvious dangers, and by what means can a more reasonable position be arrived at.

Our enquiry must be pursued in no spirit of carping criticism or irritating superiority. Modernists should covet earnestly the wholesome, though not seldom disconcerting experience of seeing themselves through the eyes of others. If at

times they are not unnaturally irritated by the smug and ignorant complacency (still alas! only too common) of the type of church worker who, in answer to well-meant attempts to present a less mechanical view of inspiration or of the growth of the Old Testament, replies in tones of thinly veiled rebuke: '*I* believe every word of it,' yet it is not unimportant to remember that to many people the apparent cocksureness of the critic is no less exasperating. The question asked with reference to Modernists: 'Don't you feel repelled by their one infallible dogma that there is no infallibility, but that they are nearer it than anyone else?' may have been unfair, but few will deny that it was worth the asking.

Undeniably the man in the pew likes what he calls plain speaking. Cautious utterances about degrees of inspiration leave him cold. He can still ask, assuming the attitude of blustering and simple-hearted honesty dear to the platform orator, 'If we can't believe the Bible, what *can* we believe?' His methods of biblical interpretation are still frankly 'textual rather than contextual.' His orthodoxy is of that timorous and rather pathetic type for which the thought of the thin end of the wedge is a perpetual bugbear. Once begin to criticise, he asserts in tones of irritated petulance, and where do you expect to end? Touch Noah's Ark, and you imperil the foundations of religion; question the story of the swimming axe, and the whole truth of Christianity is at stake.

Again, the average churchgoer has an ingrained respect for the specialist, and he regards the writers

of the Bible as specialists in their own subject, men whose statements it is almost impious to question. Just as the navigating lieutenant would contest the right of the mere landsman to teach him his business; just as it is advisable for the cobbler to stick to his last; just as butcher, baker, and candlestick maker are each competent to practise their own arts without seeking outside advice, so, it is argued, we should regard as little short of impertinence even the most cautious questioning of the legal enactments of Moses, the moral code of the Prophet Samuel, the historical veracity of Jewish historians, or the theological qualifications of the Apostle Paul.

Further, the natural man (and still more the natural woman) is conservative to the backbone. The Moody and Sankey hymn, each verse of which ends with the refrain, 'It was good for Paul and Silas and it's good enough for me,' expresses to a nicety the attitude of many ardent souls. Alongside this rather crude utterance of Evangelical piety we may set the commendation recently bestowed by the *Church Times* on a little known verse of 'Onward, Christian soldiers,' the first four lines of which run as follows:

> What the saints established
> That I hold for true,
> What the saints believèd
> That believe I too.

The likeness of the sentiments expressed in the two cases shows that the spirit of unthinking traditionalism cares nothing for denominational barriers, and can find a home with equal readiness

among the staunchest supporters of the English Church Union and the most thoroughgoing of American Protestant Fundamentalists.

Not of course that respect for the specialist is in itself a thing to be deprecated. When united with intelligence and independence of thought it is a most valuable quality. Still less ought we to belittle the testimony of the saint, where that testimony is the product of a first-hand experience of the Divine. At the same time it needs constantly to be remembered that there is no true parallel between the specialist in any branch of technical knowledge and the so-called specialist in religion. While the successful farmer would probably make a bad sea captain, and *vice versa*, both alike may be men whose religious experience is equally valid and immediate, and whose right to speak to others of the things of God is equally unchallengeable. If we speak at all of the specialist in religion, three things must be clearly recognised. First, he may be found with equal probability engaged in any one of the many occupations which it is possible to follow. Secondly, his authority, great as it undoubtedly is, can never justify others in accepting his teachings with blind docility, nor exempt them from the struggle for further light, nor lift from their shoulders the honourable burden of hard thinking. The type of all-believing orthodoxy, which finds in 'simple faith' a pretext for mental and spiritual laziness, is a sorry and a despicable thing. Thirdly, while the authority of the saint and the religious specialist holds good in the realm of spiritual truth, it has no right of veto in matters where the advance

of knowledge has rendered the opinions of an older day no longer tenable. Even the conservative scholar to-day is ready to admit that while the claim of Jesus to a unique knowledge of the mind of God still stands, yet that knowledge cannot be rightly used as an argument for the truth of the Flood story, or the literal accuracy of the tale of Jonah. Still less then are we committed to an unthinking acceptance of each and every statement for which the writers of the Old and New Testaments have made themselves responsible. In one sense, at any rate, the bland and wholesale assertion:

What the saints believèd
That believe I too

is unmitigated and dangerous nonsense. Nor need we suppose that the opinions of Paul and Silas on such a subject, for example, as that of the interpretation of the Old Testament are in any sense binding for the biblical scholarship of the present day.

Loyalty is a great virtue, but it has its dangers. When there is a conflict of loyalties in the life whether of an individual or of a Church, a struggle between loyalty to tradition and loyalty to truth, there the stage is set for tragedy. 'Loyalty is good,' asserts one of the characters in Sir Philip Gibbs's great story, *The Middle of the Road*, 'but to the highest and not to the lowest. Loyalty to lies is disloyalty to truth. That's one of life's little ironies. A damned nuisance, sometimes!'

It cannot be denied that some people's loyalty to the Bible engenders a spirit of wholesale credulity towards its statements which puts into the shade

even the trustful ingenuousness of the amateur spiritualist. We have all met the type of old lady who asserts defiantly that far from doubting the ability of the whale to swallow Jonah, she would accept unflinchingly the statement that Jonah swallowed the whale if the Bible required it. Loyality to the Bible is connected in some way not very clearly defined with loyalty to God. I shall not soon forget the triumphant contribution made by one of the members of an informal conference on the truth of the Flood story: 'Well, anyhow, God put these stories into the Bible, and so, whether they are true or not, He meant us to believe them.' This question of perverted loyalties brings us to the root of the matter. Destroy these, it is said, and you may destroy something of real value. Take heed lest in rooting up the tares you root up the wheat with them.

It would seem to be unfortunately true that the gulf between the biblical scholar and the man in the pew (even where in matters unconnected with religion he is a well educated and intelligent person) is still far wider than is commonly recognised. And one of the chief services which can be rendered to their generation by those who, while they do not themselves claim to be experts, have yet become familiar with the broad results of critical enquiry, is to help to bridge that gulf. It is their task to act as middlemen between the scholar and the uninstructed multitude. The task is urgent as much for the sake of those within the Churches who are still content to hold unthinkingly to the

traditional ideas, as for the more courageous spirits who in growing restlessness and dissatisfaction are rooting up with impatient hands the field of their old beliefs, while tares and wheat are burned indiscriminately in the fires of the awakening intelligence.

Much has of course been said upon the iniquity of disturbing with ungentle hand the simple faith of those advanced in years. But the hand need not be ungentle, nor is it perhaps unfair to say with reference to some saintly upholders of an infallible Bible that for all practical purposes they prefer the Old Testament to the New, and are Christians rather in spite of their beliefs than because of them. Moreover the members of an average congregation are not all of one age, and it may well happen that an undue tenderness for the *anicula Christiana* will result in the permanent alienation of the younger and more progressive elements.

Be that as it may, the subject of this chapter is not the peril of honest unbelief, which is itself the product of false or unintelligent teaching, but rather the far more subtle danger of a complacent orthodoxy (self-styled) which mistakes tradition for truth, preferring the false security of obscurantism to the glory of the courageous mind.

Where the not unpleasing dogmatism of youth is found in combination with an unyielding orthodoxy of the severely traditional type, interesting results may be confidently expected. Only recently a leading light in one of our Church training colleges, after setting forth with commendable fullness the

modern view of the composition of the Pentateuch, concluded his answer to an examination question thus: 'These are the views of scholars; *I* still prefer to believe that Moses was the author of the whole!' About the same time I had a talk with a more than ordinarily intelligent young school teacher, a man who had held a commission during the war, who was an experienced worker for the Church Army, and a keen student of modern psychology, but who confessed to me with bated breath that 'he was afraid he was frightfully unorthodox, but there were some parts of the Bible which he didn't quite like, especially the bit at the end of the Book of the Revelation where the writer threatens with awful penalties anybody who should add anything to what he had written.'

Speaking generally of the ordinary man's difficulties about the Bible, Dr. Herbert Gray says pertinently enough: 'No theological student has any trouble whatever with such matters, but we have not yet delivered even the rising generation from these futile and irrelevant controversies.' In this connection the reports of Convocation can only be called melancholy reading. When it can still be asked with reference to the question of a revised Psalter: 'Was it to be held that the Holy Ghost inspired a certain verse of a psalm and then stopped?' And when a Proctor who, according to the *Church Times* is 'making his mark,' finds it possible to affirm that the demand for an expurgated Psalter is due to 'a desire to keep the whole Word of God from the people, and to hide truths of which the officials of the Church do not approve,' can it be

wondered at that the mind of the ordinary man is in a muddle?

Now a Church which is doing its duty cannot afford to leave its members muddled on vital questions. The idea of an infallible Bible is not merely a harmless idiosyncrasy, it is emphatically one of those beliefs which 'a man has no right to hold, and holds at his own risk.' Equate Inspiration with Infallibility and you make the Bible a happy hunting ground for such as care to wax merry over Elisha's bears, Balaam's donkey, and of course 'Jonah and his annoying whale.' An infallible Bible leaves us no choice between wholesale credulity and blank scepticism. It renders us powerless in face of the argument that the Bible is an immoral book. It makes impossible the frank acceptance of new truth unless we have recourse to the fantastic arts of allegorical interpretation. Worst of all it presents us with a conception of God which is chaotic, and therefore worthless in face of the problems of ordinary life. Given the belief in the Bible as a single book, and the outburst of a man calling himself a materialist—an outburst moreover which occurred in a conference composed mainly of Sunday school teachers, to the effect that all the evil in the world has come from man's absurd reverence for the Bible, had perhaps more to be said for it than the scandalised vicar was willing to allow.

Enough has been said already in previous chapters of the impossibility of constructing a reasonable picture of God by the apparently simple method of collecting together all that the Bible tells us about

Him. The futility of such an attempt is becoming increasingly obvious. Less obvious, it would seem, are the dire consequences for national and international life, and not less for the paramount Christian enterprise of missionary endeavour, which must necessarily follow from the practice of constructing our knowledge of the divine character and purposes on the same principle as that pursued by our grandmothers in the making of a patch-work quilt. And to the consideration of those consequences we shall now turn.

In the first place, an infallible Bible renders impossible any clear understanding of the will of God with reference to bodily health. Much Old Testament thought is vitiated by a belief in physical suffering as God's chastisement, in disease and pestilence as part of a deliberate policy of divine judgment. Such a belief, though rejected by the best minds even among the Jews themselves (as we learn, for example, from the Book of Job) is still firmly established as part and parcel of popular orthodoxy. Readers of Charles Kingsley's *Two Years Ago* will remember how the inhabitants of a Cornish village resist stubbornly the gallant attempts of the young doctor to guard in advance against the coming of cholera. Resistance is offered avowedly on religious grounds, one man asserting definitely with reference to the rapid spread of the disease that 'his opinion always was with the Bible, that 'tis jidgment, sir, a jidgment of God, and we can't escape His holy will, and that's the plain truth of it.' Once grant the premises, and the sinister logic of the man's argument is irrefutable.

As God punished the sin of David by three days of pestilence, so the cholera epidemic was, when rightly regarded, but another instance of the same time-honoured method of divine chastisement. This attitude towards disease not only stands in radical contradiction to the health-giving activities of Jesus, but when pressed to its logical conclusion, implies that doctors, nurses, scientists—the whole beneficent army of those who are labouring for a cleaner, healthier, happier world, are in reality fighting against God, seeking to interfere with the working out of the divine purposes, striving impiously to counteract the death-dealing activities of the celestial potentate.

When thus crudely presented the blasphemous character of such a supposition becomes immediately apparent. And it is the clear duty of Christians to stand unflinchingly by the Christ-taught principle of divine-human co-operation in the interests of a better world. The customary 'Deification of the Actual,' the false resignation which allows many professing Christians to rest content with the belief that whatever is is best, the 'militant atheism' which virtually denies the possibility of achieving a social and industrial order in conformity with the mind of Christ—these and similar products of a spirit of un-Christian fatalism derive their origin, either avowedly or implicitly, from the less worthy expressions of Old Testament thought. Only by discarding openly and emphatically the irrational conception of an infallible Bible can we hope to free our generation from a crippling burden of contradictory and mind-clogging beliefs, which

owe nothing to the teaching of Christ, and are indeed essentially antagonistic to the Christian outlook.

In the second place, it has long been obvious that Christian ethics have at the best exercised but a weak and intermittent influence upon international relationships. And the reason is not far to seek. In every country the God of the Foreign Office has been the savage tribal deity of early Israel. That God shares the nationality of His worshippers, and so cannot be expected to fight against His own side, is still the popular war-time creed of all nations. Patriotism of the crudest kind, the fierce intolerance of the confirmed jingo, the stupid credulity which can believe unhesitatingly the most improbable stories, provided only that they serve to bring discredit upon 'a malignant foe'—these things, under the sinister and all pervading influence of war psychology, are exalted to the level of national virtues, and so prevent effectively the creation of a more humane, more reasonable, and less one-sided spirit.

From the Old Testament, unintelligently treated, we have received the idea of Jehovah as a Man of War; from the same source we derive an apparent justification for a comfortable theory of divine partiality, of which we ourselves are the fortunate, albeit highly deserving, objects. The Old Testament again, is responsible for the rooted conviction that between nations a policy of tit for tat, a doctrine of reprisals, is the highest form of justice. Contempt for foreigners, put into the world by the decree of an accommodating Providence 'for us Britishers

to conquer,' the ready appeal to the more vindictive exploits of Saul or David as adequate precedents for the wholesale wiping out of the German nation, the deliberate maintenance of the spirit of bitterness and revenge, the glorification of war as a satisfactory and inevitable method of solving international disputes—all these are the fruits of a false and essentially un-Christlike veneration for the letter of the Old Testament.

It is true of course that among the great Prophets were men who recognised clearly the criminal folly of the popular attitude. Amos, for example, the first of the long line of Hebrew statesmen, for whom religion and politics were inseparably connected, denounced wholeheartedly the orthodox doctrine of divine favouritism, insisting boldly upon God's impartial attitude towards all nations alike, and stressing the unwelcome truth that privilege and responsibility go hand in hand. But the true patriots, the men of international mind, made little headway and received scant sympathy, with the result that a narrow and intolerant Jingoism triumphed among the Jews after the Exile, as it has triumphed substantially in the modern world. To-day the outlook of Christ, and the New Testament doctrine of international brotherhood, are in practice ignored by the majority, and in the wider human relationships at any rate the barbaric principle of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth (a principle moreover explicitly rejected by the founder of our religion) reigns supreme. Until Christian teachers succeed in establishing in the popular mind the elementary but much neglected truth that those

who profess to follow Christ are concerned solely with his outlook, there can be but small hope of improvement. And without doubt the first step in the achievement of a genuine change of heart among the people of all nations is to destroy the incubus of an infallible Bible, every word of which is theoretically of supreme and equal value, and to substitute for it an intelligent appreciation of the origins and growth of Hebrew literature, leading as it inevitably must, to the exaltation of the New Testament to the position of undisputed primacy which for Christians it should unquestionably occupy.

Thirdly, the present condition of affairs with reference to missionary endeavour is no less disquieting. If it be true, as has been recently asserted, that the missionary flag is the one indisputably Christian flag flying at the moment, it becomes something of a tragedy that men who go forth avowedly at the bidding of Christ, and filled with a wholehearted desire to do him service, should yet carry with them the ultimately disastrous message of an infallible Bible. Mr. Frank Lenwood, of the London Missionary Society, has stated openly his conviction that if we approach the Mohammedan world holding an infallible Bible in our hand, we shall be 'beaten at our own game.' Such a Bible will pave the way for the inevitable recurrence in the native Churches of the same bitter contest between Modernist and Traditionalist to which here at home we have grown but too familiar; it will retard effectively the free and unchecked growth of a Christian public opinion upon social and inter-

national questions as it has done already in the West, and will afford a ready pretext for a relapse into sub-Christian thought and conduct whenever the standard of Christ appears inconveniently exacting. Precisely because Old Testament ethics of retaliation and revenge, Old Testament pictures of God, Old Testament levels of international morality, appeal so readily to the natural man of whatever race or colour, the obligation of the missionary is clear and inescapable. He dare not, in the supposed interests of a static and unthinking orthodoxy, expose his converts to the dangers, mental, moral and spiritual, which the proclamation of an infallible Bible must undoubtedly entail. He is bound in the name of Christ to free himself and those whom he teaches from the unnecessary and soul-destroying entanglements of an impossible dogma, and to assert unflinchingly the sovereignty of the mind of Christ, the practical applicability of Christlike standards to the solution of the infinitely complex problems of the present age.

We see then how much will have been gained when men have once learned to test the permanent value of the Old Testament by the measure of its conformity with the spirit of Christ. As Modernists all our work should be constructive in its ultimate aim. The need in teaching for the positive emphasis and method of approach cannot be over-emphasised. It is indeed far more important to build up in the popular mind a true conception of inspiration than to fulminate incessantly against the follies of an infallible Bible. When dealing with children at any rate positive and constructive teaching of the

right kind will not raise the question of infallibility at all. The true view will be taken for granted; inspiration will appear less as a dogma and more as a discovery, which the children make for themselves, and the words 'not infallible' will become superfluous.

Yet while, as one of our wisest teachers has told us, 'we should all be on our guard against denials,' there can remain no doubt at all of the crying need to-day for plain speaking, speaking which shall be destructive not of faith but of error. The bugbear of the thin end of the wedge does not alarm us. The wedge must be relentlessly driven home; true and false ideas of God and goodness must be ruthlessly separated. Only so can the Bible have its true value for the modern man. But in all this it must be made evident that we are the friends, not the foes, of the Bible. The more we learn of understanding and sympathy, the less inclined shall we become to destroy simply for the joy of smashing. Discrimination is not irreverence. Determination to reach the truth and to accept the best as the truest does not lead to a reckless disparagement of the imperfect and the relative. For all that, we have no belief in infallibilities, and for us the sole test of an inspired writer must be found in his power to inspire.

May it not be said that the inspiration of the Bible is seen not least in this, that the writers of Old and New Testaments alike were men fired by the spirit of adventure in their search for God? What they tell us of their discoveries makes us the more eager to follow the same quest. Their voices

call to us across the centuries, and we cannot but obey the call. We, like them, have in part already discovered that of which we are in search. God is both our Leader and our Goal.

And when all is said, we Modernists, no less than others, may claim to be of the number of those who 'happen to know'; albeit in our case the claim to knowledge rests on the basis neither of an infallible Bible nor yet of an infallible Church. To affirm with reference to any particular event that it must have happened precisely in the manner described, is for us impossible. On the other hand, we assert with sure conviction that God is Love, and that God's character and purposes for man have been revealed to us in Jesus Christ. If even here we do not care to speak of an infallible certainty, we are prepared to adventure our lives on the conviction that these things are true, and to accept the consequences in the spheres of individual, national and international life. Our appeal is to a certainty which is cumulative; knowledge grows more certain with the growing years. The company of those who know increases with the passing of each new day into the treasure-chambers of eternity. Its members are recruited from simple and learned alike, for in 'the things that count' the testimony of the humblest disciple is of equal weight with that of the keenest intellects, and the only aristocracy recognised in the Kingdom of Heaven is the aristocracy of love.

## Chapter V.

# A Plea for Freedom in New Testament Criticism.

The biblical critic is still looked upon by many as a dangerous person. More often than not he is roundly accused of infidelity, and of deliberately attempting to undermine the faith of simple people. At the best he is thought of as an irresponsible iconoclast who may be justly suspected of adopting advanced views for the mere pleasure of shocking his more slow-going contemporaries. If the critic should chance to be in orders, people are quick to ask how it is possible for him, holding the opinions that he does, to retain his position as an ordained minister of the Church. And unless he refrains from all public expression of his beliefs, or is particularly fortunate in his diocese, the possibility of episcopal displeasure must be continually reckoned with.

It is true that time and the courageous efforts of broad-minded Christian scholars have rendered the position far less intolerable than was formerly the case. But much ground has yet to be won before the rights of unfettered criticism can receive general recognition. A brief review of the present position with reference to both Old and New Testaments will make clear how much has already been gained, while indicating at the same time

the limitations imposed upon the critic who claims the right, while pursuing an impartial study of the Bible, to occupy the position of an accredited teacher within the Established Church.

With regard to the Old Testament the controversy has already lost much of its former bitterness. Here the issues at stake are clearly less vital than in the case of the New Testament, and the main conclusions of biblical scholars have already won a fairly general acceptance. Judged by the standard of forty years ago even the leaders of the Anglo-Catholic party may themselves be described as advanced Liberals. Older and more mechanical theories of inspiration are now quietly set aside by men of very different schools of thought. It is almost universally recognised to-day that it is not the function of the Old Testament to serve as an authoritative text-book of Natural Science; the Creation stories of Genesis are no longer insisted upon as records of fact, and the earth may go round the sun undisturbed by the indignant protests of outraged piety. Evolution has been 'baptised into Christ,' and the biologist may assert the descent of man from the ape without calling forth some caustic reference to ancestors in the zoological gardens. Room has been found within the Old Testament for a doctrine of development, both in morality and religion, and even the most orthodox divine may occupy his time in the attempt to separate the closely interwoven strands of Old Testament narrative without fear of episcopal censure. We do not look for materials of historical value earlier than the Exodus, the exploits of Abraham and the

Patriarchs are relegated to the realm of national folklore, and the literary reputation of Moses has suffered a permanent eclipse. Further, even the Old Testament miracles are defended to-day with diminished vehemence. While it is true that as recently as 1918 stout champions of Noah's Ark and 'the edibility of Jonah' were still loudly vocal in the Lower House of Convocation, yet clergy may speak quite openly of Old Testament legends and still retain a reputation for essential orthodoxy. Even the great Prophets are no longer regarded primarily as men whose business it was to foretell events in a remote future, but may be studied for their own sakes, and in immediate relation to the historical background against which they lived and taught. In short, men have learned to examine the Old Testament with the same careful and impartial scrutiny which is applied to ancient literature in general, and the result has been an immeasurable advance in our understanding of its value, and a new revelation of its treasures, both to the student himself, and to the wider public for whose enlightenment he labours.

In passing to the New Testament we are at once conscious of a marked change of atmosphere. Here much more is seen to be at stake. The conflict of opposing views is more intense, the spirit of toleration and dispassionate criticism far less evident. Methods which are deemed permissible when applied to the study of the Old Testament are regarded with suspicion when employed in the interpretation of the New. Questions of date and authorship seem of much greater importance; the existence of

inaccurate or contradictory statements is more grudgingly admitted; the human element is less readily recognised; the presence of legendary matter in the Gospels is by many roundly denied, and the suggestion that the words and acts of Jesus may in some instances have been inaccurately reported, or coloured by the beliefs of the primitive Christian community, is bitterly contested.

What then are the arguments by which those who are opposed to the unfettered criticism of the New Testament seek to make good their case?

Some would tell us that the inspiration of the New Testament documents is an all-sufficient guarantee that they relate nothing but what is absolutely and literally true. Such a position is to-day untenable. While no sane critic would deny that the New Testament is inspired, it is becoming increasingly clear to many minds that inspiration and immunity from error are not synonymous. Men who are prepared to admit the presence of legendary matter in the Old Testament cannot logically refuse to accept the possibility that similar influences may have been at work on the New. It is impossible to draw any sharp line of demarcation, and to assert that while in the case of the Old Testament the critic may carry on his researches unhampered by pre-conceived ideas, he is obliged, when dealing with the New, to define for himself, or to allow others to define for him, certain rigid and unalterable limits, beyond which it is illegitimate to pass. It is surely wiser to admit with the late Professor Sanday that 'the New

Testament must be even more liable to the same kind of influences as the Old, because whereas the Old Testament writers shaped their methods of writing history for themselves, the New Testament writers followed throughout the model of the Old Testament; their minds were full of the Old Testament narratives, and there was a natural tendency to assimilate their own narratives to them.'[1] We cannot then rule out the possibility of error in the New Testament by recourse to an arbitrary theory as to what is implied by inspiration.

Others by the simple device of transferring the doctrine of infallibility from the Bible to the Church, are able to rest content with the belief that what the Church has always accepted as true in the past, and has embodied in imposing dogmatic formularies, may be received by them without further question. Here again the argument is unsound. However valuable the testimony of past ages, it cannot deprive the present age of its right to investigate the evidence afresh, nor dictate to the enquirer after truth the results at which he is bound to arrive. Freedom from mistakes is no more the prerogative of the Church than of the Bible.

Again, it is sometimes asserted that the beauty of the Gospel stories, and the hold which they have obtained upon the human mind, is a strong argument in favour of their historical truth. While none would wish to deny the beauty of many of these stories, beauty is not of itself a guarantee of

[1] *Bishop Gore's Challenge to Criticism*, p. 13.

historical reliability. Many of the legends of other religions are beautiful also, and the value of all such stories (products, as they are, of the collective mind) lies in their power to express in vivid, concrete language ideas which have been struggling to formulate themselves in the group-consciousness of the community. It is true that 'a false anecdote may be good history.' A legend, though devoid of all historical foundation in the narrower sense, may yet give us a truer knowledge of a man's character, influence and achievements, or of the estimate formed of him by his contemporaries, than can be gained from a whole series of undoubted facts, the literal accuracy of which no one thinks it worth while to question. So much may be readily admitted. But the admission does not lead us to a wholesale acceptance of all New Testament incidents as historically trustworthy.

Once more, it may be contended—and the argument when rightly employed is of the utmost value—that the Christian superstructure must not be deprived by criticism of an adequate foundation. Great effects demand causes great enough to have produced them. No explanation of the origin of Christianity can be accepted which is manifestly inadequate to account for its results. In that which Christianity has achieved, the apologist may find the most convincing proof of the truth of the religion which he is called upon to defend. Yet here, too, we must guard against an illegitimate use of a legitimate argument. It does not necessarily follow that because Jesus of Nazareth must have been possessed of a personality of transcendent

greatness in order to achieve what he did, therefore the explanation of his uniqueness offered, for example, in the Birth Stories of the first and third Gospels must be accepted without question. Nor again ought it to be asserted that because we are bound to presuppose the existence of a cause adequate to explain the disciples' conviction of a living Christ, we are on that account compelled to accept unreservedly the story of the Empty Tomb. In both cases the critic is at liberty to suggest other explanations if these lie ready to his hand.

Finally, the opponent of criticism may simply assert that in his opinion the historical evidence for the incidents related in the Gospels is of itself a sufficient guarantee of their substantial truth. But in so asserting he has himself adopted the rôle of critic, and the matter resolves itself into a discussion of the value which may be rightly assigned to the evidence available for study.

Considerations of date and authorship, of sources and tendencies, of environment and current modes of thought, will perforce be given a place in that discussion. Both sides (Orthodox and Liberal alike) must clearly recognise that historical criticism, from its very nature, can never hope to arrive at ultimate certainty. A strong probability either for or against the genuineness of any particular incident or saying is alone obtainable. It is true that criticism has rendered orthodoxy a valuable service in establishing the relatively early date of all four of our Gospels. Never again can it be asserted that the Gospels are historically worthless productions, dating from the later years of the second century.

On the other hand, critics are coming to recognise increasingly the speed with which legendary elements can become united with genuine historical reminiscence. The fact that we may perhaps date our second Gospel as early as 63 A.D., or even considerably earlier, as some scholars now incline to believe, is not of itself a sufficient guarantee of the accuracy of the contents. No estimate of the value of the Gospels as historical documents can be considered valid to-day, apart from some attempt to understand alike the religious conceptions both of contemporary Judaism and of the Gentile world as a whole, as well as the apologetic motives by which the New Testament narratives are clearly permeated. With the central Christian thesis, 'The Messiah is Jesus,' once established, the way was opened for the intermingling of Jewish Messianic conceptions with the clear stream of genuine historical tradition, and in consequence it is often difficult to determine how far an incident or saying may have been coloured or modified in the interest of dogma or of apologetic. The presence in the narrative of this or that incident, whether we regard it as historical or not, has still to be accounted for, and there is need to go behind the story itself to the reasons for its inclusion in the written record, while if it be suspected of containing unhistorical elements, or even of being wholly legendary, there is further need to investigate the causes which led to its growth, and to arrive if possible at the underlying ideas which it is intended to express.

The critic therefore claims the right to criticise. He demands that his conclusions shall be conditioned

only by the evidence at his disposal. He denies the right of the orthodox to influence his judgment by considerations which lie outside the sphere of his own proper field. He refuses to allow his investigations to be hampered in advance by the dictates of an external authority, 'since to dictate to knowledge the results at which it is to arrive is to make knowledge impossible.' While claiming no finality for his conclusions, the critic asks freedom to examine impartially historical evidence by historical canons. If provisionally he sets aside a narrative or a discourse as of doubtful genuineness, his object, in as far as he is true to his trust, is never mere rejection. For him the beauty and value of an incident or utterance are not altogether destroyed when doubts are cast upon its historical accuracy. He is confident that the truth of Christianity does not stand or fall with the infallibility of its historical records, and therefore he goes on his way undaunted and unafraid, welcoming truth wherever he may find it, rejoicing in the liberty which is his to consecrate all his faculties to the service of God.

Consider, on the other hand, the logical consequences of the refusal to allow the claims of criticism. If the Gospels are to be regarded as immune from the errors and inaccuracies to which other ancient documents are admittedly liable; if the possibility of the inclusion of legendary elements, or of the occasional confusion of fact and its interpretation is to be summarily ruled out, this can only be at the price of creating an artificial and arbitrary distinction between the Christian

writings and other literature. Such an attitude will of necessity demand the return of mechanical theories of inspiration, from which a more enlightened Christian consciousness is struggling to free itself. In point of fact it is not infrequently the case that the would-be orthodox defender of the Gospels is at heart a more thoroughgoing sceptic than the most extreme critic. When, for example, Father Ronald Knox (in the days before the logic of his position had carried him into the comfortable security of the Roman Church) declared that to approach the Gospels without faith must lead inevitably to a loss of belief in their historical value, was not this tantamount to the admission that the truth of Christianity can only be saved by the refusal to apply the ordinary tests of truth to the Gospel narratives? Faith, or more properly its caricature, is dragged in to reverse or modify the judgment of criticism in a sphere where the critic has a right to be heard. Such a procedure is dangerous in the extreme. Indeed to stake the truth of Christianity on the detailed accuracy of the Christian documents must lead inevitably either to the suppression of criticism, or to a scepticism utter and complete. At best, and were the evidence for such narratives as those which tell us of the Virgin Birth and the Empty Tomb far stronger historically than even the most conservative critic could reasonably maintain, there would always remain an element of uncertainty, since a faith built upon that foundation alone would ever be at the mercy of the latest critical conjecture or discovery.

It may well be the case that further research will

serve to establish the probable genuineness of much in the Gospels which is now looked upon with suspicion. But the point to be specially emphasised is this: the critic, in his own proper sphere, and altogether apart from the acceptability or otherwise of his conclusions, must be allowed absolute freedom to follow the path of truth, wherever it may seem to lead. He must have an unchallenged right to maintain his own opinions, and while he may not seek to force them upon others, it is no less true that those whose conclusions are not in agreement with his are simply not justified in branding with the stigma of infidelity one whose honest endeavours after truth have led him to a position which they are themselves unable to adopt, or from which, it may be, they feel bound emphatically to dissent.

We have now to face a question of vital importance. Assuming the right of the critic, as a result of his examination of the evidence, at least to suspend his judgment as to the historical trustworthiness and literal truth of not a few incidents which he finds related in the Gospels, will not the consequent uncertainty with respect to matters which have long been presumed to be of the deepest significance for the religious life, affect disastrously the value of Christianity as a power in the hearts of men? The layman, it is said, cannot be expected to appreciate the hair-splitting distinctions drawn by the theologian. Tell him, for example, that though the story of the Virgin Birth ought not perhaps to be accepted to-day as a fact of history, yet its essential value remains inasmuch as it serves to express a profound truth in the realm of

ideas, and he will simply fail to understand you; ask him to believe at one and the same time that while the story of the Empty Tomb may not improbably be due to the conjectures of the disciples following on the appearances of a living Christ, yet the belief in the Resurrection remains to all intents and purposes unimpaired, and he will accuse you of seeking to escape the charge of honest scepticism by resort to a dishonest quibble. In short, let him once believe that the accredited teachers of the faith are themselves uncertain of the truths which they are commissioned to proclaim, and you lose for ever the hope of bringing home to him the message of Christianity as a gospel of joy and power.

The problem is one of intense gravity. It is of little use, in face of the spectacle of men and women robbed, as it seems to them, of their most precious beliefs, for the critic to talk blandly of his own disinterested pursuit of truth, regardless of the consequences. It is no light thing to be thought to undermine deliberately the faith in which a man may have lived and worked for half a life-time. To lay impious hands upon the cherished spiritual possessions of another is a form of sacrilege from which all but the most callous must inevitably shrink in horror. Little wonder that some are found to recommend with all earnestness the careful suppression of truth whereby alone, so they would assert, men can hope to retain intact the beliefs of a more credulous age. Such people tell us frankly that 'Liberal Christianity is true but will not work in practice, while Orthodoxy works but

is not true.' Hence they declare themselves advocates of Orthodoxy which, whatever its defects on the intellectual side, has yet proved its undoubted value as a working faith. Here is indeed a counsel of despair! Shall we submit tamely to the conclusion that the truth as a man conceives it must be withheld from his brother, lest that brother's faith should suffer ship-wreck? Shall the servants of the God of Truth seek to advance His cause by the deliberate suppression of the truth they see? Shall the false succeed, and the true be found to fail? Beyond all doubt, and be the risk what it may, the critic dare not hold his peace. Moreover, those who conceal the truth will themselves inevitably destroy the very confidence in Christianity which they desire to establish. When it is once suspected that religious teachers, whether from ignorance or timidity, are deliberately withholding the truth from those who come to them for instruction and guidance, or are studiously confining their teaching to the presentation of a single point of view on debatable questions, their influence will be for ever gone. It is already to-day less dangerous to faith that a man should boldly proclaim that which he holds as true, believing that the spirit of Christianity must not be confounded with the varying media through which it has sought to express itself, than that from cowardice or false consideration for the feelings of others, he should convey the impression that he does not know or dares not speak.

While, however, in theory honesty is the safest as well as the highest policy, it must still be admitted

that the difficulties which beset the path of the Christian teacher to-day are by no means inconsiderable. There is truth in the oft-repeated assertion that the mere scholar is wholly incompetent to appreciate the real significance of much which he presumes to criticise. The temper of the critic and of the Christian pastor are too seldom found united in a single personality. The man of keenest intellect does not necessarily see the furthest into the spiritual meaning of the Christian faith. A faculty for the detection of contradiction or error in the biblical documents may be united with a complete incapacity for the understanding of religious truth. But Christianity, if it be of value at all, must be of value as proclaiming to men the gospel of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The world will not be saved by the intellect alone, nor will the most enlightened views on the literary sources of the Gospels serve of themselves to bring a man one single step nearer to the understanding of the spirit of Christ. This the critic cannot too often remember. The work of criticism is but the subordinate though necessary means to the attainment of an end higher than itself. The critical examination of documents, the unbiassed endeavour to discover the origin and background of an incident or a discourse, and to distinguish between primary and secondary elements in the Gospel narratives, has but one purpose—the knowledge and elucidation of the truth. There is need to-day as in the past for a Christianity vital and dynamic; the religious teacher must seek with unwearied patience the channels of thought and

expression by the use of which the life and power of the Christian faith may flow most freely into the hearts and lives of the men and women of the present age. While modes of presentation must inevitably vary with the march of time, the life and truth of which they are the temporary embodiment remain for every unchanging and unchangeable. Said Goethe: 'Mankind is always advancing, Man remains ever the same.' The task of the true critic is to speed the process of what has been well termed 'the unification of thought,' and boldly to indicate the new forms by recourse to which the permanent in Christianity may be most effectively presented to the men of to-day. So high and difficult an enterprise demands nothing less than the consecration of the whole man to the service of humanity. To demolish is not enough; the critic is called to a work not merely of casting down but of building up; he is properly concerned not simply with the letter but with the spirit also; he must give attention not only to processes but to values; he cannot ultimately rest content with negative judgments, being impelled in his search for truth to reach out towards those spiritual and abiding realities which lie behind our transitory and imperfect modes of expression.

We see then that while the historical critic must be allowed the fullest measure of freedom in the framing of his conclusions, yet the inner significance of Christianity as a living power can in the last resort reveal itself only to those in whose lives and actions the spirit of Christ receives visible expression. In his own proper sphere the critic

has an unchallenged right to a patient hearing. So long as the question is one of the origin and authenticity of this or that incident or utterance recorded in the Gospels, his opinion, however revolutionary, is entitled to the fullest respect and consideration. When, however, the enquiry is concerned with the religious value of stories or sayings as manifesting the Christlike spirit, and so calling forth an immediate response from the same spirit in the heart of the Christian believer, then the task of mere literary and historical criticism is superseded by the far more difficult task, laid upon the Christian consciousness, of intuitive acceptance or rejection. That is to say, the spirit of Christ within the heart of the disciple has the right to pass judgment upon alleged words and acts of Christ as presented in the Gospel records. In the estimation of the religious value of a story or an utterance as a medium of the spirit of Christ, the Christian consciousness as embodied in those whose lives approach most nearly the acknowledged standard of Christian perfection, is of paramount authority. Here, in the region of 'values,' the testimony of the saint, the intuitive certainty of the religious man, must be accepted as decisive. As the late Dr. James Drummond put it, 'The Christian consciousness stands in relation to moral and spiritual truth, but has nothing to say in regard to merely scientific or historical questions.'

This sentence puts the matter with admirable clearness. It marks out for us the respective provinces of saint and critic, in as far as these are conceived as incapable of combination in a single

individual. Further, it throws light on the important question of the extent to which Christianity is only to be understood by men of trained intellect and specialised education. If Christianity is intended for all, then the thought that its richest treasures and true meaning can be made available only for those (of necessity comparatively few) whose training renders them competent to pronounce judgment upon intricate questions of historical criticism, becomes clearly intolerable. It may be true that 'God never meant it to be an easy thing to believe,' yet the capacity for belief must be as much within the reach of the rustic as of the theologian. The difficulties in the way of belief in Christ are at bottom the same for scholar and peasant. Christianity is spirit and life, not the formal confession of a creed intellectually satisfying to the most fastidious critic. He who has the spirit of Christ, he whose life is lived in ever closer conformity with that spirit's leading, is the true Christian. The standard set is the highest possible. But it is as much within the reach of the simple as of the learned, of the rustic as of the philosopher, and if the way of attainment be hard, it is a way from the following of which none are excluded.

Thus, where each is true to his own proper function, there can exist no inherent antagonism between saint and critic. The whole question, rightly understood, is one of the respective spheres wherein they are called to work. Just as there is not, nor indeed can there be, any essential conflict between religion and natural science, as slowly, and with many a backward step, we are at last beginning

to learn, so critic and saint have no cause for quarrel. Trouble arises only when the one presumes to dictate to the other on matters which lie outside the sphere in which he is competent to judge. Saint and critic are alike seekers after truth. And to neither must we deny the freedom which is at once the indispensable condition and the coveted prize of adventurous seeking.

# Chapter VI.

## Criticism and Devotion.

An imaginary conversation between Baron von Hügel and Father Tyrrell, said to have been invented by the latter, and quoted by the Reverend Alfred Fawkes in the *Modern Churchman* of March, 1925, raises in an acute form the old problem of maintaining at one and the same time a frankly critical and genuinely devotional attitude towards the narratives of the New Testament.

The supposed conversation is given as follows:

H.: 'There can be no doubt that our Lady failed to occupy her proper place at the Crucifixion; the evidence of the Synoptic writers makes this clear.'

T.: 'Yes? But it is a long way from this to the *Salve Regina*.'

H.: 'There can be no doubt that our Lord's faith broke down on Calvary.' (cf. Mark xv. 34).

T.: 'Yes? But it is a long way from this to the Nicene Creed.'

H.: 'There can be no doubt that St. Paul's teaching as to the Eucharist (1 Cor. x. 16–17) is based on certain forms of Syrian Nature-Worship.'

T.: 'Yes? But it is a long way from this to the *Tantum Ergo*.'

H.: 'I hear the Angelus; and I must go and make my evening visit to the Blessed Sacrament.'

No one who is to some extent acquainted with New Testament problems can fail to appreciate the implications of such a passage, and it may prove of some value to take a concrete instance of the difficulties involved in the attempt to combine the unfettered use of the critical faculty with the fullest appreciation of the spiritual significance of the Gospel narratives.

Let us then take as an example the words reported to have been spoken by Jesus from the cross, considering them first of all from the standpoint of historical criticism.

Suppose that the critic, seated in his study, and provided with Greek text, synopsis of the Gospels, concordance and commentaries, is endeavouring to arrive at an impartial judgment of the historical value of the so-called Seven Words from the Cross. He notes first of all that all the words do not occur in all the Gospels. Mark, he finds, contains but one, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' An utterance found also in Matthew, who, however, substitutes Eli for Mark's Eloi. Luke has three sayings peculiar to himself, and John three. What inference then is to be drawn from the circumstance that Mark, admittedly the earliest Gospel, records but a single utterance? Did the writer not know of any others? Or did he think it not worth while to record them? Why does Matthew change the Aramaic Eloi into the half Hebrew Eli? Does he recognise that the cry as it stands in Mark could not possibly have been interpreted as an appeal to Elias? How far was it physically possible that one who had hung on the

cross for six hours should have 'cried with a loud voice'? What significance is to be attached to the fact that the words are a quotation from the Messianic 22nd Psalm? Was it natural that at such a moment Jesus should make use of words of Scripture with which he must have been familiar from childhood? Or is there any reason for thinking that the Christian community would be likely to attribute the words of a Messianic psalm to the dying Christ? Finally, may we see in the despairing nature of the cry the surest proof of its historicity, on the theory that no one could conceivably have placed such words on the lips of Jesus unless they had actually been spoken by him, forasmuch, as is apparently the case with Luke who omits them, they would necessarily cause difficulty to believers? Or on the other hand, is it in point of fact safer to assume that the presence of the words in Mark and Matthew is an indication that in the earliest period apologists for Christianity were more interested in the Messianic character of the utterance as a proof of the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy by the death of Jesus, than offended by the apparent hopelessness and sense of utter desertion which the cry appears to indicate? Undoubtedly even Mark's narrative of the Passion is strongly influenced by the impulse to find Old Testament support for the various incidents of the story, and it is at least highly probable that in the attribution to Jesus of words from the 22nd Psalm we have an instance of the history-making tendency which the stumbling-block of the Cross and the imperative need for its removal inevitably created.

We pass now to the first of the three sayings ascribed to Jesus by Luke: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' A glance at a critical apparatus of the text of the New Testament makes it immediately clear that, on the testimony of the best manuscripts, the words cannot have belonged to the original text of the Gospel, but must have come 'from an extraneous source.' This circumstance does not of course preclude the possibility that the words may be a genuine utterance of the crucified Jesus. But the critic is bound to determine whether, all things considered, it is more probable that we have here to do with an actual saying of Christ heard by some who were standing near the cross, and afterwards repeated to the personal followers of Jesus, than that the words are an expression of a desire on the part of the community to put into the mouth of Jesus at such a moment sentiments so clearly in harmony with his recorded teaching on the duty of forgiveness and love of enemies—sentiments, moreover, which find a clear echo in the dying utterance of the martyred Stephen. Nor must it be forgotten, in view of the admitted influence of the Old Testament upon the Gospel narratives, that the Hebrew Text of Isaiah liii. 12 has the reading, 'He made intercession for the transgressors.' It is perhaps not improbable that here, too, we have another instance of the history-making tendency already referred to.

The request of the dying robber, 'Remember me, when thou comest in thy kingdom,' and the immediate response which it called forth, 'Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise,'

cannot but give cause for reflection. What are the probabilities of so radical a conversion on the part of a man with such a past who but a short time before is represented by Matthew as having joined in the abuse flung at Jesus by his companion and the crowd? It is true that the crucifixion of two malefactors with Jesus is recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels. Nevertheless the question obtrudes itself, To what extent is doubt cast upon this feature of the Passion story by the fact that it came early to be regarded as a fulfilment of Isaiah liii. 12, 'He was reckoned with the transgressors'? Luke (xxii. 37) makes Jesus refer to the prophecy even before his arrest, and inferior manuscripts of Mark insert an allusion to it after xv. 27, which records the crucifixion with Jesus of 'two robbers.' Once again we are confronted by two alternatives. Either the presence of the two malefactors is historical, and a supposed prophecy of the event has for apologetic purposes been discovered in Isaiah liii. 12, or a fictitious event has been built up out of an imaginary prediction.

Luke's final word, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,' is a quotation from Psalm xxxi. 5. The text of the LXX has the future 'I will commend,' altered by Luke into the present 'I commend.' The future tense seems to stamp the words as a prophecy; their fulfilment in Jesus changes future into present. Here again the critic must consider how far it is likely that such words should have been spoken immediately before death. He must ask himself whether, as in the case of the single saying attributed to Jesus in

Mark and Matthew, the motive of prophecy and fulfilment may not be present in this case also; he must allow the possibility that the words may have been deliberately substituted for the wordless cry of Mark xv. 37, just as John assigns to the dying Christ the sublime utterance, 'It hath been accomplished'; he must remember finally that both Luke and John appear deliberately to have omitted the cry of despair.

We pass now to the three Johannine words. And first, What is to be said for the historicity of the saying, 'Woman, behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!' The judgment formed with regard to the Johannine utterances will depend largely upon the critic's opinion of the Gospel as a whole. If he views it as a historical document of the highest value, written by John the son of Zebedee, who is identical with 'the disciple whom Jesus loved,' he will naturally accept the words as spoken to the author, so that their genuineness would seem to be vindicated beyond possibility of reasonable doubt. If, on the other hand, he is inclined to reject the Johannine authorship, and to regard the Gospel as of value less as a record of historical fact than as an interpretation of Christ as he appeared to a profound religious genius unacquainted with the historical Jesus, and careless of historical detail, he will naturally be more cautious in his conclusions. It will occur to him to note that Mark makes mention only of 'women beholding from afar,' a statement repeated by Matthew and Luke, and he will ask himself whether, had the other Evangelists known of the incident recorded by John, they would have

been likely to omit it from their narratives. True, on the assumption that the incident is not historical, no obvious interpretation of its significance is forthcoming. For all that, the likelihood remains that we are concerned here with an idea expressed in the form of a supposed saying of the crucified Jesus rather than with an actual happening. And the one thing which the critic feels he can say with certainty is that the presence of Mary at the cross is not historical.

What, again, must be said of the cry, 'I thirst'? At first sight it looks like an actual reminiscence of human weakness on the part of the suffering Jesus. But on closer inspection this impression gives place to another. The sentence runs: 'Jesus, knowing that all things are now accomplished, that the Scripture might be accomplished, saith, 'I thirst.' Or, as Moffatt translates, 'As Jesus knew that everything was now finished and fulfilled, he said (to fulfil the scripture), '' I am thirsty.''' Was the cry after all the result not of human weakness, but of a desire that nothing might be lacking to the complete fulfilment of Scripture? To attribute such a motive to the historical Jesus might well seem an absurdity. But our knowledge of the importance assigned by the author of the Fourth Gospel, no less than by the Synoptists, to the fulfilment of the Old Testament in Jesus, renders such an interpretation of the passage little less than a certainty. The case is not materially altered if we punctuate the sentence differently, thus: 'Jesus knowing that all things are now accomplished that the Scripture might be accomplished, saith, I

thirst.' The emphasis on the fulfi'ment of Scripture remains, and Psalm lxix. 21, 'They gave me also gall for my meat; (cf. Matthew xxvii. 34) and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink,' gives the key to the whole passage.

What has been said will naturally influence the interpretation given to the final word, 'It is finished,' 'It hath been accomplished.' Here, again, the important fact is the fulfilment of the Old Testament in the life and death of Jesus Christ. The Messiah can now die content since the last prophecy concerning him has been fulfilled, and the proof from Scripture (the most important apologetic weapon in the armoury of the early Church) has been thus rendered complete in every detail!

Such in outline might be the attitude of the critic towards the Seven Words from the Cross. In the case of the single utterance recorded by both Matthew and Mark, while not presuming to pronounce a decisive denial of its historicity, he would yet feel very strongly the force of the arguments against it. Of the Lucan words he would say that though in themselves they are not impossible as utterances of the historical Jesus, there are in every instance elements of uncertainty by which different minds will be differently affected. With reference to the Johannine utterances, unless indeed he were convinced that the Gospel had been written by John the son of Zebedee, who was himself present with Mary at the cross, he would be conscious of even graver doubts. For even were he to accept, in face of the contradictory evidence of the Synoptics, the presence of the Beloved Disciple,

he would yet be compelled to question the authenticity of the two final words (or at least the interpretation clearly put upon them by the Evangelist) since the anxiety attributed to the dying Christ that the proof from Scripture might not fail of its complete and detailed fulfilment would appear to him as historically inconceivable.

But now, secondly, let us consider the same Seven Words from the standpoint of the Christian preacher. Let us suppose, for example, that the critic whose methods and probable conclusions we have just been studying is himself a parish priest, and is called upon in that capacity to conduct the Three Hours Devotion on Good Friday. What is his position? Clearly it will be useless to speak to the congregation of textual evidence, apologetic tendencies or critical difficulties. It is not for this that people have come together. They desire rather to spend their time in quiet meditation upon the eternal significance of the cross of Christ in the divine purpose of redemption. They wish to think of the meaning of these last precious utterances of Jesus in relation to their own inner lives and to the needs and duties of the common day. They require from the preacher only such simple words as may best direct their thoughts to these channels, since avowedly the aim of the whole service is the quickening of devotion, the translation of vague impulses towards the Christlike life into concrete acts of love and service.

Thus of necessity the preacher will dwell on the great spiritual lessons of the words of Christ. He will speak, for example, of the tenderness of

divine forgiveness, of the need for the cultivation of a like spirit in his hearers, of the sovereignty of goodness whereby the robber was won from an attitude of impenitent ridicule to the certainty of a triumphant faith; he will find in the presence of Mary at the cross a symbol of that mother-love which breaks down every barrier set across its path, and in the words of Jesus that courteous consideration of a son for his mother which all must strive to emulate and make their own. He will speak with deepest reverence of the cry of desertion, seeing therein an assurance that God's own son in dying for the world's redemption left no depth of suffering unplumbed, counted no cost too great against the value of a single human soul. In the 'I thirst' he will find proof of the full humanity of the sufferer, as of his power to call out the best even from the rough soldier who answered the Saviour's appeal. John's word, 'It is finished,' will serve perhaps as the text for a few simple utterances upon the importance of a life directed towards the true goal of its fulfilment, while Luke's words of committal will be thought of quite naturally as the model for the prayers of Christians for whom death, through the victory of the risen Christ, has lost its terrors.

From such thoughts as these the congregation will gain at least some help in the art of Christian living. And throughout no word has been said of doubt or difficulty in accepting unquestionably the seven sayings as the authentic utterances of the historic Jesus. All such problems are felt instinctively to be out of place at such a time. Yet

what would be the feelings of a devout member of the congregation were he aware of the preacher's opinions as to the historical value of those utterances, the spiritual value of which he had attempted to express? Or alternatively, what is the position of the educated layman at such a service, into whose mind there has once entered the consciouness of uncertainty as to the genuineness of all or any of the words attributed to the crucified Jesus? In the former case the hearer might well look on the preacher at worst as a dangerous unbeliever who had forfeited his right to speak as an accredited representative of the Church, and at best as one whose intellectual honesty was at least seriously open to question. While in the latter instance, he might not improbably feel himself deprived of any practical help which the devotional study of the words had previously given him by the disquieting suspicion that his emotions would fain lead him into regions where his reason forbade him to enter.

We find ourselves confronted by the old question: How far do the worth and truth of Christianity depend upon the established accuracy in detail of the Gospel records? If doubt is once cast upon the authenticity of the last words of Christ, are we on that account driven to the admission that their value as sources of Christian assurance and edification is wholly destroyed? The case for such a conclusion is admittedly easy of presentation. Many an exponent of Christianity would argue thus: If you once admit the possibility that a word attributed to Christ was not actually spoken by him, you

immediately destroy all confidence in its value. When, for example, you throw doubt upon the genuineness of the first word from the cross, you take away our faith in a Christ who is both able and willing to ask forgiveness for his murderers; and worse still, you undermine our certainty that Christ so prays to-day for those who reject him. Again, by suggesting that Mary never stood by the cross in the hour of her son's agony, you make of her less than the true mother, and at the same time deny to Christ a beautiful utterance of filial love. So with each of the words—maintain that they were not actually spoken by Jesus, and you destroy for ever their power of consolation to the stricken heart. What is the answer to such assertions? Admittedly in questioning the historical truth of these precious utterances the critic accepts a tremendous responsibility, for unless he can show that the value of words attributed to the historical Jesus is in part at least independent of their detailed accuracy, or even in some cases of their actual genuineness, he will appear as one who recklessly destroys the dearest possessions of another, while unable to offer in exchange one single gift whereby the sense of irreparable loss may be at least modified, if not removed. What can the critic achieve towards the reconstruction of a fabric of faith which he himself would seem to have overthrown?

In the first place it must be said definitely that the cause of truth cannot be served by its suppression. Sensitiveness for the feelings of others must not lead to the burking of problems which require to be frankly faced. And in general at any rate there

can be no doubt that the application of critical methods to the study of both Old and New Testaments alike has resulted in gain rather than in loss. The faith even of the simplest Christian has nothing to fear from the abandonment of a doctrine of verbal inspiration which is at once an insult to his intelligence, and a hindrance to a true appreciation of the merits of the Bible.

But secondly, and with more immediate reference to our present problem, it may be asserted emphatically that the words from the cross are by no means robbed of their devotional value even when subjected to the most 'extreme' and 'destructive' criticism. And here it needs to be said with emphasis that even the 'advanced' critic does not, and indeed cannot, do more than suggest certain reasons for his belief that the Seven Words from the Cross may be best interpreted as the product of Christian reflection working upon the challenging fact of the crucifixion of the Messiah. Some there are who, even when the fullest possible weight has been assigned to the critical arguments, will still be content in every instance to give the words the benefit of the doubt. Such an attitude is legitimate so long as it is recognised that to others the evidence may lead to less conservative conclusions. The fundamental mistake is to assume that the whole value of the sayings depends upon the production of overwhelming testimony against the more negative position. This evidence, from the nature of the case, is not forthcoming, and to seek to discover it is on that account sheer waste of time.

Assuming then for the moment that the more

negative judgment upon the words from the cross commends itself as true, what has the critic to say of the causes which have produced the sayings as they stand, and of the devotional value to be assigned to them on the theory that they were never actually spoken by the historic Jesus?

First of all, the worth of that creative impulse of the community which manifests itself in the utterances attributed to the crucified Saviour as well as in other parts of the Gospel narrative, is surely in itself by no means inconsiderable. Quite apart from its historical trustworthiness, a story or saying, even though in the strict sense of the term it must be branded as fictitious, may yet afford valuable evidence of the loyalties and beliefs of those who are responsible for its origin. So in the case of the words we are now considering, while we are not in a position to prove their genuineness beyond possibility of doubt, while indeed not a little evidence may be adduced which appears to make definitely against it, none the less these sayings remain of the first importance, even on the hypothesis that they are not the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus of Nazareth, for the light which they cast upon the opinions actually entertained by his followers about him. The time has long gone by when men applied to the narratives of the Gospels the theory of deliberate fraud. While the presence of a strongly marked apologetic is becoming increasingly apparent more particularly in the fourfold story of the Passion, the critic would be the first to admit to how large an extent the history-making tendency to which we have already referred

was both inevitable and unconscious. The Evangelists are recording impressions of one whom his followers believed to be Messiah, whose personality had exercised a profound influence upon those who had personally known him, and whose spirit was felt to be active among his adherents of a later day. What wonder, therefore, when enthusiastic faith found itself confronted by what appeared as malignant scepticism, if the earliest written records show some sign of the conflict between belief and incredulity? Add to this implicit apologetic tendency the inevitable desire to express the fervour of the Christian belief in Jesus in terms of a higher Christology, coupled with the popular love of the marvellous and picturesque, and you have three of the main motives which may be seen at work in the Gospel narratives as these have come down to us.

In the first word from the cross we possess evidence if not of that which Jesus actually said, at least of that which the belief of the community, as embodied in an early tradition, attributed to him. The fact that such a saying is put into the mouth of Jesus affords proof positive that his teaching upon the need to forgive had made a deep and lasting impression. Even if we adopt the unnecessary theory that the words as they stand may be an echo of the dying utterance of the martyred Stephen, *ex hypothesi* regarded as historical, it will make but little difference, since the spirit of forgiveness manifested by the disciple is assuredly itself a reflection of the spirit of the Master.

Take the second word. The swift recognition by

the robber of the innate royalty of Jesus, and the immediate response which it called forth, alike remind us of the relations of Jesus with social outcasts, so that tradition is not seriously at fault in drawing for us such a picture, nor can uncertainty as to its historical accuracy destroy its value as evidence of the community's idea of what might properly be expected of Jesus at such a moment.

The saying to the mother of Jesus, assuming that it is not historical, is more difficult to account for. It may be simply due to the popular demand that the Lord's mother and his beloved disciple shall be found together beneath the cross. Much more probably, however, the incident is capable of some symbolic interpretation, to which the key has now been for ever lost. Its value, unless it be regarded as historical, is relatively slight.

The cry of desertion, even on the theory that it has been placed in the mouth of Jesus from an instinctive feeling that words from a Messianic psalm may fittingly have been spoken by the dying Christ, is a valuable indication of the belief, established even in the earliest days, and before the words came to be regarded as a stumbling-block to faith, that the sufferings of Jesus possessed an eternal significance as part of the divine plan, and were essentially in line with the sufferings of God's saints recorded in the sacred pages of the Old Testament.

From the word, 'I thirst,' if it be not a historical reminiscence, it is again difficult, as in the case of the first Johannine utterance, to derive any meaning of lasting value, unless indeed we may find it in

the Evangelist's conviction of the Messiahship of Jesus, a conviction which makes him meticulously anxious that supposed prophecies of the Messiah's sufferings shall be fulfilled in detail.

Much the same may be said of the 'It is finished.' For here the words, though they refer primarily indeed to the fulfilment of the Old Testament in the career of Jesus as Messiah, are yet capable of a profounder application. They are an indication of the writer's consciousness that Jesus had indeed fulfilled the divine purpose both in life and in death, and here is a conviction of momentous significance, though admittedly the manner of its expression does not readily commend itself to the modern mind.

The last word of all illustrates the confidence of Luke, or of the community in general, that Jesus cannot have died otherwise than calmly confident of the divine protection, of which, as none other before him, he had possessed throughout his life an unwavering assurance.

Now it will be said by some, Why this round-about and unnecessarily complicated method of arriving at the value of these utterances, when it is so much simpler frankly to accept them as historical? The answer can only be, Once grant the possibility, as the candid critic is compelled to do, that any or all of these last sayings of Jesus may be in fact spurious, and the above is the only sure method of arriving at their true value. For even on the most negative estimate of their historical worth, they yet remain beautiful in themselves, and what is more, unimpeachable witnesses to the thoughts and beliefs of the early followers of Jesus,

and so, indirectly at least, to the character and spirit of Jesus himself.

At first sight at any rate it may indeed seem unnecessary to attribute to the mind of the community what may well be thought to have originated with Jesus himself, or far-fetched to credit the disciple with sentiments which ought rather to be assigned to the disciple's Lord. Yet, and herein lies the positive value of the method adopted, while we can never be absolutely sure that in this or that utterance we have the word of Christ, we can attain to definite certainty that such and such was the opinion of his followers about him. Who will care to deny that a certainty of this kind is of supreme worth? Here, in the Seven Words from the Cross, we have evidence of the community's estimate of their crucified Master and living Lord. They believed him to be one who could say these things even in the hour of death. For had it been otherwise, no apologetic impulse, however potent, could of itself have assigned to him such words. Their presence in the Gospels is a sure guarantee of their essential conformity with his spirit as known and appreciated by his followers. So much stands sure. Hence no criticism, not even the most radical, can ever deprive these utterances of their priceless value as evidence of the mind which was in Christ Jesus.

# Chapter VII.

## The Layman's Christ.

The appeal of Jesus of Nazareth was an appeal to laymen. With the ecclesiastical leaders of his day he could do little. Sometimes they amused him, and he tried, with laughter in his eyes, to show them their folly; more often they angered him by the astigmatism in their moral and spiritual vision. Both laughter and rebuke stirred them to vindictive hatred.

The friends of Jesus were laymen. Brown-skinned fishermen, with the fisherman's command of lurid language; keen-faced tax-collectors, alert and grasping; prostitutes learned in the lessons of a dreadful school; young men with hearty appetites, strong passions, generous instincts, lavish alike of loyalty and resentment, ambitious, covetous of the prizes of the court, as men are wont to be who know nothing of court life.

The way of life which Jesus chose was as lay as his friends. The contrast between him and John the Baptist was sufficiently striking to be matter of common talk. Men said of Jesus that he cared overmuch for food and wine; they twitted him about his disreputable friends; his fellow-townsmen threw his carpenter's trade in his face, and despised him because they knew his people.

The teaching of Jesus is as lay as the rest of him. Country sights, doings of the common day, little

incidents of a poor man's home, the joys of the open air—these are the background of his homely talk. Paul, the man of the city, the Pharisee trained in the subtleties of hair-splitting argument, however much Christ meant to him, could never appreciate his Master's love of the country, and spontaneous appreciation of a country life. The question, 'Doth God care for oxen?' gives him away at once. One side of the greatness of Jesus was closed to him for ever.

Under the guidance of those pioneers of reality, T. R. Glover, H. E. Fosdick, and Herbert Gray, the layman of to-day can gain a picture of Jesus at least relatively true in the impression which it makes upon the mind. And others with far less knowledge are striving, however blindly, to free themselves and their fellows from the conventional and anæmic horrors of the stained-glass window. H. G. Wells, despite the impertinence which prompted him to write his ignorant caricature of Jesus in *The Outline of History*, is at least groping after truth when he says:—

'The lean and strenuous personality of Jesus is much wronged by the unreality and conventionality that a mistaken reverence has imposed upon his figure in modern Christian art. Jesus was a penniless teacher, who wandered about the dusty sunlit country of Judaea living upon casual gifts of food; yet he is always represented clean, combed, and sleek, in spotless raiment, erect, and with something motionless about him, as though he was gliding through the air. This alone has made him unreal and incredible to many people who cannot distinguish the core of the story from the ornamental and unwise additions of the unintelligently devout.'

A bricklayer friend of my own, who had not, I think, read Wells, is certainly on the right track when he protests against the misleading presentations of Jesus:—

'With a gentleman's hands, well trimmed nails, and hair nicely shampooed, with a comely face and beautiful skin, with beard and moustache carefully combed and trimmed.'

Here is his picture of the real Jesus:—

'A carpenter, who for long years slung the hammer, the axe, the hatchet and the plane; who had no deals cut to sizes, but who sawed them to his requirements by the strength of his arm; a craftsman whose hands were horny with toil and heavy work; a man who pushed the wheelbarrow and handtrucks, and carried ladders through the streets of Nazareth and the surrounding country until nightfall, who handled his food with dirty hands, and did not correct his disciples for doing likewise, who sat down to his meals with the masons and labourers of Nazareth and district in sheds and outhouses, having to listen to coarse jokes, filthy language and ribald laughter, whose face was marred and furrowed by toil, weariness and pain, whose neck and arms were burnt brown by exposure to wind and rain and sun, who read the Scriptures between supper and bedtime.'

That picture, despite a false touch here and there, shows at least a craving for something real, a not unhealthy reaction from conventionality; and in vigour of expression it has a decided advantage over the vague and superficial presentation which Wells offers us.

It has become a commonplace to say that the man of to-day does not like the thing which he is asked to accept as Christianity. No less true and much more serious is the assertion that he does

not like the figure presented to him as Christ. The real Jesus was attractive to ordinary people; of that the Gospels leave us in no doubt at all. Some of course he repelled; but none was left uninfluenced by the impact of his personality. To-day the Christ of the Churches repels, but for a different reason. He is conventional, unreal, aloof, colourless, ecclesiastically minded. The Carpenter of Nazareth has no place in our churches, and for the most part his fellow-carpenters stay outside in consequence. The essentially lay personality of Jesus has been captured by the ecclesiastics, obscured by theological shibboleths (which he hated), made to care for things which are sub-Christian, claimed by the respectable as the supporter of their respectability, by the conservative as the champion of the *status quo*, by the prude and bigot as the justification of their narrow and uninspired lives.

Dr. Orchard has said somewhere that all efforts to turn the Jesus of the Gosepls into an Anglican clergyman have failed in their object. By that path we do not reach reality. But neither will any mere reaction from conventional ideas, however justifiable in itself, however drastic in the forms of its expression, suffice to bring us to our goal. Pictures like that drawn by my friend the bricklayer serve indeed a useful purpose, as showing that Jesus of Nazareth was a real man of flesh and blood, who could and did mix easily and naturally with all sorts and conditions of men. They are valuable in as far as they stimulate a sluggish imagination and create a background of familiar happenings.

They help us to see why Jesus appealed to the lay mind of his own day. But though all this may be gratefully acknowledged, we must still maintain that such pictures, indispensable as they are, do not go far enough, nor solve the central problem which confronts the Church at the present day. While the Jesus of the past, stripped of the trappings of convention, freed from the trammels of unreality in which a rather mawkish piety has loved to hold him, presented in his true greatness as the friend and teacher of ordinary folk—while this Jesus will ever be a source of strength and inspiration to those who will study his portrait, made available to-day as never before through the labours of patient and impartial Christian scholars, yet to stop here is to stop at a point very far short of the acceptance of Christianity as a life-giving and world-transforming creed.

As a plain matter of history, and from the written record of their own impassioned statements, we know that the inspiration of the men who turned the world upside down in the first century was derived not merely nor mainly from the Jesus of the past, precious as must have been the store of personal memories of days in Galilee. The Christ of the present was the supreme reality for all who followed him. Not reminiscences of a past, however sacred, but the abiding consciousness of an intimate and empowering companionship with the living Christ supplied, beyond all possibility of doubt, the driving force of Christian achievement in the early days.

Paul, who in all likelihood had never seen Jesus

in the flesh, who perhaps cared relatively little for what we should now call biographical details, to whom the reminiscences of Galilean fishermen may have appeared somewhat irrelevant, if not positively wearisome—even Paul, whose mind, as we have seen, was hermetically sealed against much in life which had for his Master an irresistible appeal, possessed a picture of the living Christ which called forth a response of love and loyalty without parallel for intensity and passionate eagerness.

May we not say that the supreme problem which confronts the Church is capable of formulation in terms such as the following? —How can the appeal of Jesus of Nazareth to the laymen of his own day be rendered effective for the man of the twentieth century, whose outlook and environment, *mutatis mutandis* (and less perhaps has to be changed than some would imagine) is essentially the same? No mere reference to the past, no character-sketch of the historical Jesus, however brilliant, no elucidation of the Sermon on the Mount, however clear and convincing, not even the passionate rejection of conventional trappings, not even the almost fierce craving for reality which prompted the reference to 'hands horny with toil, arms burnt brown by exposure to wind and rain'—none of these things, however valuable in themselves, can solve the problem.

The Jesus of the past can never save the world of to-day. There must be the presentation, fearless and insistent, of the living Christ as a present reality. To point to the influence of Jesus on the men of his own time is of little use unless we are

prepared also to proclaim him the most influential person in the modern world. The Christ men need is the same in all essentials as the Jesus of Galilee. Now, wherein does this essential 'sameness' really lie? To cease to present Christ as an Anglican clergyman is something; to portray Jesus the Carpenter of Nazareth to his fellow-carpenters as a real human person is something more. But the significance of Jesus lay neither in the fact that he was *not* an Anglican clergyman, nor even in the fact that he *was* a carpenter. It lay rather in his mind, his outlook, his scale of values, his attitude to God, to ordinary people, and to ordinary life. The mind of the eternal Christ is the mind of Jesus of Nazareth. But if that be so (and the conviction that it is so lies at the very heart of the Christian faith) then the Christ of the present, if he can be truly presented to the layman of to-day, will make an appeal as irresistible in the greatness of its challenging simplicity as the appeal of Jesus to Peter and his fellow-fishermen.

Whether we like it or dislike it, the fact remains that not in Jesus the teacher of a noble ethic, but in Jesus crucified, living, eternally present, have men found salvation. The claim frequently made that for the writers of the first three Gospels the teaching was everything, the Teacher nothing, is clean contrary to all the evidence. In every century the men who have loved Jesus have loved him not merely for what he taught, but for what he did and for what he is. Mr. Wells, under the influence of one of those unfortunate impulses which prompt him and not a few of his fellow-journalists

'to interfere in matters which they do not understand,' has recently told us in his 'Great Indictment of the Churches' that multitudes to-day are following the teachings of Christianity while caring nothing for the Teacher or even for the name Christian, and he would apparently desire to see the Church itself, as a condition of its future success, following the lead of these uncounted, and for the most part mythical, exponents of common-sense Christianity.

Whatever we may think of Wells's Indictment, his plea for a Christianity without a Christ, and even without a name, can gain no tittle of support from the history of nearly twenty centuries. The merely 'good advice' religions, as a great psychologist has said recently, don't grip. It has indeed been forcibly argued that there is enough in St. Mark's Gospel alone to save the world, that were Jesus after all nothing but a character in fiction, he would yet be a character with the mind of God, and so adequate as a vehicle of divine revelation. The truth would seem to be found rather in a sentence of Dr. H. R. Mackintosh: 'Christianity has in its veins the life-blood of fact. Hence the disciple of Christ can stand up and proclaim not simply what he feels, but what God has done.' Dr. Mackintosh then adds the following striking story in illustration of the predominant emphasis which Christianity has always laid on what he aptly terms the Divine Initiative.

It is said that the theophilanthropist Larevellère-Lepeaux once confided to Talleyrand his disappointment at the ill-success of his attempt to bring into vogue a

sort of improved Christianity, a benevolent rationalism which he had invented to meet the wants of a sceptical age. 'His propaganda made no way,' he said, 'what was he to do?' he asked. The ex-bishop politely condoled with him, feared it was indeed a difficult task to found a new religion, more difficult than could be imagined, so difficult that he hardly knew what to advise! 'Still'—so he went on after a moment's reflexion—'there is one plan which you might at least try; I should recommend you to be crucified and to rise again the third day.'[1]

It is doubtless true that the ordinary man is impatient of what he contemptuously terms 'mere theology,' and few will say that that impatience is altogether without justification. Yet the parrot demand for an ethical Christianity in which Dogma—that bugbear of the English mind—shall have no place, is the merest nonsense. After all, Dogma itself is nothing but an attempted formulation of the permanent significance of Jesus Christ. The need to-day is not for an undogmatic Christianity, but for the restatement of old dogmas in a form which shall be intelligible to the twentieth century mind. Christianity apart from the Cross, apart from its central truth of a living, present, empowering Christ, is not Christianity at all, but something infinitely poorer. The task which confronts the theologian to-day is that of so presenting the meaning of the Cross, of so interpreting the significance of the truth of a living Christ, that the figure of the real Jesus instead of being obscured in a cloud of meaningless technicalities, may stand out before the man of to-day—a challenge at once gracious and relentless to thought and action.

[1] *The Divine Initiative*, p. 48.

The work of the Christian teacher is to proclaim the Christ of the present in terms of the historical Jesus. To do this will be to remove from the lay mind the feeling of uneasiness and discomfort, of which the ordinary man is too often conscious when Christ is referred to. Just as many people, partly perhaps through their own fault, are uneasy in manner and speech in the presence of a parson, so they tend to be also in the presence of the parson's Christ. In both cases the atmosphere is apt to be artificial, and consequently oppressive. On the other hand, just as the Jesus of the Gospels appealed irresistibly to the essentially lay mind once, so the real Christ, eternal, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever, can speak to the condition of the same type and temperament to-day. If it be not so, then Christianity must be dubbed a useless, though to the few, it may be, interesting survival from other days, belonging entirely to the past, powerless to mould present conditions, with no authoritative voice in the controversies of our own age. But if the New Testament and Christian experience speak true, then Christ lives, his mind and purposes are as much within the compass of the ordinary man's intelligence now as in the days of his flesh, his relevance alike to the life of the individual and of the world cannot fairly be disputed, and his appeal to the modern man, who sees him face to face, will be found to have lost nothing of its attractiveness and power.

## Chapter VIII.

# The Church and the Man: A Threefold Indictment.

No statistics are needed to prove that the majority of men do not attend church services. On the other hand, any clergyman who takes the trouble to visit his parishioners knows that Englishmen, taken as a whole, are not unfriendly. They are kept away from church not by hostility to religion as such, but by lack of interest in the official presentation of it. The ordinary man does not readily express his views on certain subjects even to his friends, nor are his objections to the Church always self-consistent or clearly formulated; yet it is not impossible to arrive at some general idea of the nature of his antagonism to organised religion. To put the matter in a nutshell: men stay away from church because, as it seems to them, however incapable they may be of putting their feelings into articulate speech, the Church's position to-day is intellectually untenable, morally ineffective, and spiritually unsatisfying.

The rise of biblical criticism, and the wide dissemination of its main results, together with the broader outlook created by a free secular education, have produced on the part of millions of people a critical and questioning attitude towards the narratives of the Old and New Testaments, which even fifty years ago would have been impossible.

To-day the amateur scientist will talk learnedly of the impossibility of reconciling Genesis with geology. Some diligent reader of the Rationalist Press publications will seek to floor you with questions about sun gods, Pagan Christs, or the nature of the evidence for the Resurrection; while a bluejacket exponent of lower deck theology will proclaim triumphantly the result of his researches in the sphere of the comparative study of religions: 'Bless your heart, I've seen too many religions where I've been to believe all that the parson tells us!' It is all extremely crude, entirely natural, and of the highest significance.

Many men are extraordinarily childlike in their attitude towards the Bible. When once suspicion has been aroused as to the truth of some Old Testament story, the whole Bible is promptly discarded as a book of fables which no sensible man can be expected to believe. It is easy for enlightened persons to discourse eloquently upon the folly of such wholesale rejection, and yet, if the premises are accurate, and the ordinary man finds no good reason for believing the contrary, the conclusions which he draws from them are after all logical enough. He has been taught to think of the Bible as a single book, 'The Word of God'; for him inspiration and infallibility are interchangeable ideas; hence a single error is seemingly sufficient to undermine the argument for the truth of the whole. Proud of his new knowledge, the man is impatient of authority, unwilling to accept guidance from those who have most right to speak, scornful of simple folk who still cling to what he regards as

exploded ideas. The 'believe this because I tell you' line of argument affects him not at all.

A large number of clergy to-day hold views of the Bible which the intelligent layman would be ready to accept, yet it would appear that comparatively few have the courage frankly to share those views with the congregations to which they minister. The consequences of this timidity are nothing less than disastrous. The layman, knowing that the stories of the Old Testament are solemnly read in church Sunday after Sunday, naturally assumes that those who read them believe them to be true, and therefore it becomes impossible for him as an intelligent man to hold any very high opinion of the parson's intellectual capacity. If, on the other hand, he is told that many clergy do not nowadays cling to the literal truth of these stories, he is likely to make the obvious retort: 'Then why do you allow them to be read as the Word of God? How can you justify the policy of foisting on others what you have yourselves ceased to believe?' Inestimable harm is wrought by this conspiracy of silence on the part of the clergy. It results inevitably in one or other of two alternatives: either, men say, the parson does not know, or he dare not speak. If he does not know, he is a fool; if he dare not speak, he is a coward: in either case we have no use for him.

Surely the outstanding need to-day is for a liberal outpouring upon the Church of the spirit of common sense, combined with a simpler faith in the essentially religious nature of the ordinary man. People are not going to be helped by the dreary

reiteration of stories which they no longer believe, nor need we fear that to stimulate interest in the Bible by an honest account of its origin and character will lead to infidelity. An attitude of willingness on the part of the clergy to make known the true position of affairs would produce a corresponding readiness on the part of laymen to accept their guidance, and would do much to destroy the influence of honest opponents of the type of the Robert Blatchford of the old days, who achieve most of their success by the device of launching furious attacks upon positions long ago abandoned as unsatisfactory by the majority of thoughtful Christians. When the parson has once gained the confidence of his hearers by a manifest willingness to speak out and to face the facts, he will have gone far towards dissipating the unfortunate suspicion that the Church is afraid of new knowledge, and thus it will become possible to lead men to an appreciation of the spiritual value and true beauty of much in the Bible which they have hitherto merely despised as unfit for the consideration of intelligent people.

The argument for the inefficiency of the Church's moral witness is two-sided. It may be said either that the morality of large parts of the Old Testament falls far below the standard of multitudes to-day who make no religious pretensions whatever, or that when, as in the teaching of Christ, the Church gives to men a magnificent ideal, there is yet little or no attempt on the part of organised Christianity to convert theory into practice, and to make the spirit that is called Christ incarnate in every human relationship.

Now it is easy for those who understand something of the process by which the Old Testament has reached its present form to talk learnedly of progressive revelation, and to despise as simpletons people who find a real difficulty in stories of wholesale massacres carried out at the divine command, or to whom the treachery of Jael, the amours of David, or the petty vengefulness of Elisha are matters of genuine concern. But once again, as with the intellectual difficulties of the ordinary man, it is a question of the premises from which you start. When Mr. Blatchford in *God and My Neighbour* wrote scathingly of 'the anger, injustice, immorality and cruelty of Jehovah,' or described the heroes of the Old Testament as 'unspeakable savages,' not a few were found to agree with him, and to assert in all honesty that with such a god, with such a book, they would have nothing to do. If people of this class are told that no thoughtful Christian to-day believes that God could have given His sanction to the massacre of innocent persons, or could have looked with approval upon acts of treachery and petulance, the retort is obvious and unanswerable: If such be indeed the case, then why allow such stories to be read publicly in your services? How can we possibly know what you wish us to believe?

Surely here also the matter demands both plain speaking and common sense. When will the clergy recognise the grievous harm done to the cause of religion either by allowing these stories to be read Sunday after Sunday with no word of explanation, or worse still, by misguided attempts to justify from

the pulpit actions which are wholly incapable of justification? How much longer must we wait for permission to read from the Old Testament only such passages as may be of positive help to the congregation, and to omit entirely all incidents obviously unsuitable for public use?

To pass now to the alleged failure of the Church to conform even approximately to the ethical standards of Christ and of the New Testament. However ignorant the ordinary man may be of ecclesiastical organisation, he knows at any rate that the morality of the New Testament is of the loftiest character; and he has a roughly correct idea of what should be the attitude of professing Christians to the great moral and social abuses which mar the national life. It may be that on occasions he is rather glad to pick holes, and to condemn the Church somewhat hastily for failing to adopt his own interpretation of the teaching of Christ. But with so much granted, the main issue is still unaltered. The man is aware that according to the teaching of the New Testament all distinctions of class and sex are done away. Yet, as he believes, the Church actually encourages class distinctions, and looks with disfavour upon the movement to give to women the opportunities for more effective service which they have the right to demand.

Again, he knows that in the New Testament wealth is regarded as a hindrance to godliness, and he is told that the follower of Christ must be ready to count loss as gain for his sake. Inevitably, therefore, he is honestly puzzled by 'the fatal

opulence of Bishops,' despite well meaning and largely irrelevant attempts to make him understand the difference between incomes official and incomes unofficial, and frankly disgusted by the unedifying spectacle of high ecclesiastical dignitaries clinging like human limpets to lucrative positions which on the score of advanced years they are no longer competent to occupy.

Finally, to take but one more instance out of many, he is aware that Christ's special care was bestowed on outcasts and children. Yet he finds in the majority of cases that the parson is much better acquainted with the communicants of his parish than with the non-churchgoing or frankly disreputable elements, while the Church appears to make at best but a half-hearted attempt to combat effectively the evil conditions of slum life, which year by year are directly responsible for the death or stunted development of thousands of children.

In the circumstances it is perhaps scarcely surprising if the ordinary man feels no burning enthusiasm for the Church as an active instrument of moral and social reform. Mere talk of love and brotherhood will do no good. Querulous warnings to the clergy not to allow themselves to pose as court chaplains to King Demos are rather pathetically irrelevant in all but a few cases. High-sounding exhortations, having as their theme the dangers in the path of a Church which dares to express its corporate mind on great social and political issues, are little better than camouflaged confessions of the impotence of Christianity to affect decisively for good

the complex life of the modern world. Surely the time has come when the Church's leaders will do well to pride themselves less on their fondness for judgments which are quiet, slow, and deliberate, in matters which demand from them a definite and immediate lead. A reputation for caution may sometimes be purchased at too high a price, and the possibility of making mistakes cannot justify the refusal to act at all. Certain it is that until men learn to find in the Church a courageous pioneer in all wise measures of moral and social betterment, its influence for good can be but comparatively slight. It cannot be well that the initiative, whether in the sphere of intellectual progress or of social amelioration, should seem in the eyes of the average man to proceed almost invariably from those for whom the Church, as an organised fellowship of the professed followers of Christ, has largely ceased to count.

It is not difficult to recognise that men who are dissatisfied with what they conceive to be the Church's intellectual and moral standpoint, will be scarcely likely to receive much conscious spiritual help from its ministrations. And yet the Church exists precisely in order to give to men that faith in spiritual realities without which they cannot know the true meaning of life. Men, like children, if they are to be educated aright, must first of all be genuinely interested in what they are expected to learn, and must be given opportunities of expressing for themselves the ideas which have been put before them. Most important of all, if interest and effort are to be maintained, they must have

a clear understanding of the purpose to be achieved at the cost of so much strenuous mental activity.

What is the effect of the ordinary church service—Mattins or Evensong—upon the average man? As a rule, it would be safe to assert, he is frankly bored by the whole proceeding. The language employed is never that of ordinary life. As Mr. Adderley once put it, 'The jargon we talk in church is as unintelligible to the working man as the jargon of an I.L.P. meeting would be to a Protestant old lady at Bournemouth.' The forms of prayer and praise, beautiful in themselves as they often are, and sanctified by centuries of Christian devotion, are not those in which a man to-day naturally expresses himself. The present use of the Psalter is little less than an insult to the man who makes any attempt to understand what is being sung. He is vaguely offended by the abject cringing, as it seems to him, of the Confession, puzzled, bored or shocked, more often than not, by the lessons, bothered by the senseless monotone of choir and parson, roused perhaps to momentary interest by some favourite hymn, in the singing of which he is able to give vent to his pent up emotions, but once more reduced to a condition of semi-somnolence or irritated antagonism by the dogmatically delivered platitudes of the sermon. Too frequently he leaves the church without the remotest understanding of any real purpose in it all, having received little or no practical assistance in meeting the difficulties and temptations of his daily life. Never once has he been in touch with realities; never once has his interest been aroused by any

plain reference in prayers, psalms, or lessons, to contemporary happenings, unless it be by the rather perfunctory use of some special collect, expressly sanctioned by episcopal authority with reference to a particular crisis, and representing but too often the Church's only audible response to the challenge to be up and doing which the crisis offers. The man's whole attention has been directed throughout to events in a remote past or an unreal future. Never at any period of the service has he been able to give natural expression through the mouth of the officiating minister to his own needs and spiritual aspirations in language which he can understand and appreciate.

Once again, those who recognise most keenly the need of reform are checked and hampered by the unwillingness of the authorities to take effective action. True, the project of a revised Prayer Book has now engaged our liturgical experts for a period not far short of twenty years; but progress has been quite exasperatingly slow, and the suspicion is not perhaps unwarranted that the revisers scarcely recognise even yet the urgency of the question, and the far-reaching, not to say drastic character of the reforms required. We are still told in some quarters that the ordinary man does not want a revised Prayer Book, and that the whole agitation for revision is the work of a small section of discontented clergy, who continue to demand changes without adequate cause. It is of course obvious that the volume of articulate lay opinion in favour of revision is still comparatively small, for the double reason that the regular churchgoer is the

most conservative creature alive, and that the bulk of men, whose habit it is to regard church attendance as the exception rather than the rule, care not at all for any Prayer Book, revised or otherwise. But the difference between our needs and our desires, between the things we want and the things we ought to want, is often of the widest, and while the ordinary man may not be crying out irrepressibly for a revised Prayer Book, his seeming apathy is certainly no indication that all is well. Indeed it is not too much to say that until the Prayer Book *is* revised by scholars who understand to the full what are the ordinary man's legitimate needs, all efforts to get him inside a church in any appreciable numbers will be not merely unavailing, but of small value even were they to meet with unlooked for success.

The crying need is for a far larger measure of elasticity in the conduct of public services. We should be able at discretion to get away altogether from the phraseology of the Prayer Book. Congregations differ so enormously from parish to parish, that a wise element of congregationalism, far from being deprecated as is the case in some quarters, is precisely the reform most urgently required. Some scope should surely be allowed for extempore prayer, at least at certain services, and under proper restrictions. And where set forms are employed, a wide range of variety should be permitted, and the prayers should express with natural simplicity needs and aspirations not only individual, but national and world-wide. On occasions at any rate it should be possible to dispense altogether

with psalms and lessons, and to substitute for them carefully made selections of poetry or prose from the writings of non-biblical authors. Interest, enthusiasm, and above all, a sense of reality and a clear realisation of the purpose of religious fellowship, must be secured by every legitimate means.

It is well that the Christian life should be depicted for young and old alike as a splendid venture in which all true men are called to bear their part. The religious instincts of the Englishman are essentially practical; he needs to understand far more definitely than is the case to-day what are the primary aims and dominating ideals for the sake of which the Church exists, and what should be his own individual share in their accomplishment. The appeal for personal service in all departments of human life, service rendered freely and intelligently to a living Christ, a Christ presented in all the glorious completeness of his full humanity, will not fail of its response. The task before the Church is so to make that appeal that all who hear, arrested by the sublime audacity of the challenge made to them, may be impelled to active membership in the Christian society, in the spirit of Browning's lines:—

'I am young . . . happy and free!
I can devote myself; I have a life to give.'

# Chapter IX.

## Reality in the Pulpit.

Our age is one of free enquiry and unfettered criticism. In all departments of knowledge progress is rapid, and the plea of antiquity of no account. Methods, institutions, beliefs are subjected to the most searching examination. Where practical efficiency is the one criterion of worth, everything which fails to satisfy this test is thrown upon the scrap-heap of the past without further ceremony. Religion forms no exception to the rule. The authority of Church or Bible is no longer accepted without question; each must prove its value and submit to an impartial scrutiny of its credentials; neither can claim to be immune from criticism, nor plead antiquity in lieu of worth. The test of efficiency is applied here also. A Church failing to justify its existence on the score of practical usefulness will gain scant support from those who work for progress and reform; a Bible which, as expounded by its official interpreters, is found too often to be out of touch with modern problems, and to create more perplexities than it is able to solve, will count for little in the formation of national character and ideals. Men who think are sorely puzzled on many points; there is much that they want to know, a host of questions relative both to religion and to life to which they seek an answer. And it is for the preacher to welcome these enquiries

after truth, and to give what help he can in meeting the difficulties and clearing up the misunderstandings of the ordinary man.

While in theory both the imperative duty and the high privilege of such a work may appear obvious enough, in practice it is not infrequently impeded by the double obstacle of ignorance and of timidity.

But too often in our own day, if we may accept the judgment of the late Dean of Carlisle, the intellectual level of the pulpit is below the intellectual level of the man in the street. Many clergy, it would seem, are either wholly unaware of the presence of difficulties in the minds of those who form their congregations, or blandly indifferent to what they regard as the foolish doubts or ill-expressed questionings of ignorant people. Impatient alike of the progress of biblical scholarship and the crude cavillings of the half educated, they distrust the scholar and despise the stump orator. Such men, while boasting loudly of their unswerving loyalty to 'the old truths,' seek to conceal the inherent weakness of their position by exaggerated claims on behalf of the authority of Church or Bible, thinking to stifle incipient doubt by a reiterated and parrot-like insistence upon the obligation of unquestioning faith. Clergy of this type are apt to profess a lofty indifference to the results of 'the so-called Higher Criticism'; while some among them who claim to be wits seek to gain cheap and unintelligent applause by representing the critics as hopelessly divided among themselves, a device which serves the double purpose of exalting the

obscurantist in the eyes of the orthodox, and at the same time excusing him once and for all from the tiresome necessity for serious thought and exact study. 'I don't care to read,' said the successful and kindly incumbent of an important parish, 'I know enough to please my people'!

A more telling argument, and one entitled to respect by reason of the obvious sincerity of those who adduce it, is that the paramount need to-day is for constructive preaching. Criticism, it is admitted, has its place, but that place, many would hasten to add, is emphatically not the pulpit. The dominant aim of the sermon must be not to suggest difficulties, but rather to build up faith. By a well-meaning attempt to meet imaginary objections, the preacher may be the means of setting a stumbling-block in the path of the simple believer; a man looks to find in the sermon practical help in the living of his daily life, and not the discussion, however clear and painstaking, of academic questions.

These contentions, it may be frankly admitted, are not without a certain measure of cogency. There are preachers who delight to parade their theological learning before a befogged and unedified congregation of village rustics; others again, mere pickers up of critical crumbs, have but slight understanding of the problems of which they speak so glibly, and are little better than theory-mongers, preferring novelty to truth. But these are the exceptions. And it is undoubtedly the case that for very many the difficulties of placing before their hearers even the established results of a sober and

reverent criticism of the Old and New Testaments seem frankly insurmountable. The suppression of truth appears in their eyes as a lesser evil than the possible loss of faith which they fear might be the consequence of plain speaking. It is better, they say, that people should believe too much than too little. The bugbear of an unsettled faith haunts them at every turn, and is responsible for an attitude of nervous timidity, or at best of 'tepid liberalism,' whereby incalculable harm is wrought to the cause of true religion and sound learning.

It may of course be readily granted that the ultimate aim of every sermon, as indeed of all true criticism, should be constructive and positive, and not merely negative and destructive; but that is not to deny that the ground must often be cleared of useless or unsuitable materials before the real work of construction can properly begin. The preacher who attempts to build upon an insecure and ill-prepared foundation plays the part not of a wise master-builder, but of an ignorant and culpable fool. It is therefore much to be wished that the claims even of 'destructive criticism,' if by that is meant the courageous demolishing of false and consequently dangerous opinions, might be more openly recognised. There are clergy who appear to suppose that if they themselves maintain a discreet and unheroic silence on all questions of biblical criticism, the members of their congregations will continue to be blankly ignorant of the conclusions of scholars and the vague questionings of the half-educated multitude. They forget apparently that the problems which they dare not

face are freely and openly discussed in the newspaper, lightly solved in the monthly magazines by glib-tongued journalists, with a minimum of qualification for their responsible task, and hotly debated in the common meeting places of ordinary folk.

This attitude of false reserve on the part of many preachers is precisely on a par with the immodest prudery which makes many parents unwilling to speak frankly to their children on matters of sex. The children, finding that at home the subject is shrouded in impenetrable mystery, quickly learn to go elsewhere for their information, and inevitably come to believe that the whole topic is one of which their parents are heartily ashamed. So is it with the seeker after truth in religion. The man who cannot get the help of which he is in search from the accredited teachers, will without doubt take his difficulties to those who are less reluctant to withhold their counsel. Child and man alike will not be slow in arriving at the conclusion that the very people with the best right to enlighten them are afraid of the truth. It will follow that while in neither case is there any guilty secret which must be hidden at all costs from the seeker after knowledge, yet once such an idea gains a firm hold on the mind of the enquirer, the influence whether of parent or of religious teacher will have been for ever destroyed.

The preacher who is convinced alike of the eternal truth of the Christian gospel and of the imperative necessity of bringing to its interpretation the new knowledge which natural science, psychology, and biblical criticism have placed at his disposal, can at least be clear as to his general aim and

purpose. His interests as a parish priest will be eminently practical. If he resolves to teach from the modern standpoint, it will be from the conviction that the attempt must be made not simply on the score of personal preference, but as a matter of the sternest moral obligation. While deprecating what has been aptly termed 'the amazing licence of affirmation' which many clergy are accustomed to allow themselves, he will seek to stress insistently the fundamentals of Christian belief and practice as these were taught by Christ. His guiding principle, to adopt the late Dr. Sanday's telling formula, will be the principle of 'continuity of thought and relativity of expression,' for he will recognise that while the essential truths of religion are and must be ever the same, yet in every age the Christian teacher is confronted afresh by the problem of so relating eternal truth to the main currents of contemporary thinking that it may be readily understood and assimilated by the men and women of his own day.

But if the aim and purpose of the modern preacher are sufficiently clear, that is not to say that the task before him is one easy of execution. He is confronted at the outset by two main difficulties. First, there is the difficulty of speaking helpfully to a congregation, the members of which differ from one another not merely in point of age, but (what is of far more consequence) in their intellectual, moral, and spiritual outlook. Obviously the ordinary congregation cannot be grouped or 'graded' for purposes of instruction according to an age-scale, as is usual in a reformed Sunday school.

But even were we to assume the practical possibility of such an arrangement, the real problem would scarcely have been touched, since the fundamental difference between one man and another must be estimated not according to age, nor yet by reference to the amount of knowledge acquired, but primarily by the extent to which a man has learned to think independently and to keep his mind open for the reception of unfamiliar points of view. While the minds of some people, it has been asserted, are closed hermetically at the age of twelve, those of others are still open and receptive at the end of a long life of varied experiences. How can the preacher at one and the same time speak helpfully and intelligibly to the possessors of these two radically divergent classes of mind?

It is probably true to say that at the present time, and in the average congregation, whether of the town or the country parish, the proportion of closed minds is much the larger, while the needs of the open-minded are at once far more pressing, and far more difficult to meet. At every turn the preacher finds himself confronted, not merely by lack of knowledge, but by the deep-rooted though loosely formulated conceptions of popular theology. R. L. Stevenson admits that he has always suspected public taste to be a mongrel product, out of affectation by dogmatism. Were we to adapt Stevenson's phrase, and describe the theology of the average churchgoer as a mongrel product, out of tradition by sentimentalism, the assertion would not perhaps be altogether unwarranted. A host of faulty impressions, confused

convictions, inherited prejudices and mistaken loyalties make progress extraordinarily difficult. False theories of inspiration, chaotic conceptions of God, conventional portraits of Christ, are so many obstructions in the way of a dynamic faith. While it is happily the case that much bad teaching, though meeting apparently with unquestioning acceptance, may yet remain practically unassimilated, and so to all intents and purposes harmless in its effects, and while it is also true that behind a traditional and unreasoning orthodoxy there is frequently to be found a living religion, much good sense, and a rough and ready capacity for distinguishing in practice between vital truths and temporary or imperfect attempts at their expression (so that the critical faculty is not so much lacking as untrained and unrecognised), yet there is still present the supreme problem of finding language real and direct enough to be able to make its way through a formidable barrier of erroneous ideas. And this, the first of our main difficulties, is immeasurably increased by the second, which has now to be named.

'It takes,' says Thoreau, 'two to speak truth—one to speak and another to hear.' But even granting this ideal combination of a truth-speaking preacher addressing an audience with minds in a condition of eager receptivity, we are as yet by no means safely out of the wood, since, as has been cruelly but not untruly said, so long as the present Anglican Prayer Book remains in force, it may be safely asserted that whatever truth is spoken from the pulpit will have been contradicted by something

which has been previously said in psalms, prayers, or lessons. And it is these (in conjunction with their faithful ally, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*) which exercise the really formative influence upon the temper and outlook of the congregation.

Perhaps the primary obstacle in the way of an intelligent faith is the idea of the Bible as a single book of uniform value and inspiration. From this it will follow inevitably that the ordinary man's thought of God must be alarmingly chaotic. It is not that there is as yet any general tendency towards an intellectual or moral revolt, but simply that the attempt to combine the God of Noah and Samuel with the Father of Jesus Christ leads to a sense of confusion no less real for being in the majority of cases still inarticulate. Let the preacher try as he will to present to his hearers a portrait of God which is essentially Christlike, and so in conformity with the central message of the New Testament, as things are at present he must always speak with the depressing consciousness that his most resolute efforts will be effectually nullified by the insidious influence of some prayer, psalm, or lesson, of which the spirit is sub-Christian and therefore alien from the temper and purpose of his own message. Of what use is it for a Regius Professor of Hebrew, addressing the members of an Oxford Summer School, to utter a courageous protest against the folly of using in public worship certain psalms, whose only gospel is that of a militant and intolerant Judaism, when correspondents in ecclesiastical newspapers can still babble of 'mystical interpretations,' and when Bishops can withhold

permission for the provisional use of the specially selected Sunday psalms, on the plea that a good deal of objection is still made to them in certain quarters? Again, how can the hearing of God's 'most holy Word' serve to the edifying of the congregation, or help to illustrate convincingly the preacher's declaration of a loving God, when, though the spirit of the Old Testament lesson may be one of vindictive savagery or narrow nationalism, the compilers of even the Revised Lectionary are seemingly content to have it so, and the rigour of episcopal authority forbids any unauthorised deviation from the prescribed course? Finally, what chance has the preacher to portray convincingly Christ's own dominant conception of a Father-God, when all too many of the prayers are framed in a language which reflects rather the fawning temper of the slave in presence of a capricious and tyrannical master, than the glad confidence of sons who approach their father in a spirit of love and trust? Reiterated cries for mercy, or petitions such as 'spare us,' 'be not angry with us for ever,' are surely not the spontaneous utterances of men who have been with Jesus, nor do they presuppose a true understanding of the divine character as our Lord revealed it. 'How long,' it has been pertinently asked, 'shall we continue to ascribe to God methods of dealing with His children which the best minds of our own day have already rejected as unsatisfactory in the case of the schoolboy and the criminal?' Yet much of our Prayer Book is based expressly upon the assumption that these inferior methods are a reflection of the ways of God.

The approach of a special season such as Advent, or indeed the coming of any of the great Christian Festivals, is a yearly challenge to the preacher to strive for reality in his teaching, and not to rest content with any mere repetition of the old phrases, some of which can serve no longer as vehicles of truth for the men and women of the modern world.

Advent in particular is a time when the danger of unreality in thought can never be far distant, when the essential message of the Christian Church —a message unchangingly true in every century—is only too likely to be marred and obscured by its presentation in a form and against a background which are wholly alien from the modern outlook. Few of us to-day can accept whole-heartedly the New Testament belief in a visible coming of Christ upon the clouds. The magnificent picture of a Great Assize at the Last Day loses its power of appeal when the details are pressed upon our consideration with literal exactness. And indeed the entire stock-in-trade of Jewish scene painters appears bizarre and unreal when viewed in the cold light of a modern scientific environment. Hence the preacher of to-day acts wisely in attempting to discriminate sharply between letter and spirit, eternal truths and the temporary vehicles of their expression, essentially Christian conceptions and the imperfect, or even, it may be, positively misleading settings which have been assigned to them in popular thought. The Advent sermon, if it is not to be a stumbling-block to those who hear it, must deal but little with the gorgeous trappings of the Jewish eschatological background, concentrating

rather upon the thought of the fourth Evangelist, for whom divine judgment means not the sensational verdict pronounced upon the countless millions of humanity by a celestial potentate at the 'Last Day,' but rather a continuous process of separation, a process inevitable, relentless, almost, it might be said, automatic, a process whereby men are divided into two classes by the inescapable test of their reaction to the fact of Christ. 'The Mind of Christ,' says the Bishop of Manchester, 'is the reality of things.' The nature of the response which we make to that reality must determine our fate at the hands of the divine Judge.

Here is a conception intelligible to the modern mind and of the highest significance. But that significance is to-day largely nullified for the ordinary congregation by the intrusive influence of Advent lessons, Advent collects, Advent hymns, one and all of which, however incontestable the matchless dignity of their language, or the hold which they have gained upon the affections of generation after generation of Christian folk, yet exercise an effect little short of disastrous upon the thinking and outlook of the modern man. A growing sense of unreality, the permanent obscuring of the real Christ by the unreal and not seldom vindictive figure of the Jewish Messiah, the wholesale attribution to the historical Jesus of methods and functions to which he laid no claim, and from which (as we see in the Temptation narratives) he turned with scorn—these are too heavy a price to pay for the doubtful privilege of continuing to use prayers,

hymns and lessons to the real trend of which custom and mental lethargy have too long made us oblivious.

The Festival of Christmas, despite the tender beauty of its message and the eternal significance of the stupendous fact to which it testifies, has for the modern preacher certain difficulties of treatment of a kind from which his predecessors of an earlier day were altogether exempt. It would of course be unpardonable if the attention of a congregation were directed on Christmas Day to a consideration of the arguments for and against the literal historical accuracy of the story of the birth of Jesus as that is told to us in the narratives of the first and third Gospels. On that point there can be no two opinions. Nevertheless the modern preacher should be aware that among the members of his congregation there are in all probability the representatives of three distinct classes of persons—those whose whole faith in the Incarnation hinges directly upon the story of the Virgin Birth: those who recognise that that story, whatever its supposed historical value, is assuredly not the central pivot of the Christian faith: and those for whom the story is a positive hindrance to their belief in a Christ human enough to be an incentive and an example for daily life.

Towards those in the first class the duty of the preacher is twofold. He must try on the one hand by clear and sympathetic instruction to make it evident that for the writers of the New Testament themselves belief in the Incarnation in no way depended upon acceptance of the story of the Virgin Birth, since Paul, Mark, and the writer of the Fourth

Gospel (whose Christology is more developed than that of either Matthew or Luke) agree in omitting all reference to the alleged event. On the other hand he must be ready frankly to denounce alike the intolerance, the Pharisaic complacency, the unattractive cocksureness which but too often characterise the pronouncements of the orthodox upon arguments and objections, the real nature of which they seem unable to appreciate.

A particularly glaring example of the unhelpful (and may we not add un-Christlike?) temper of some who defend the story is afforded by a little poem which appeared recently in the *Morning Post*, and which, 'lest some should have missed it,' the *Church Times* hastened to reproduce. The poem reads as follows:—

TO THE HIGHER CRITIC.

Christmas, 1923.

"Little Jesu—in a stable!
Pretty still—but still a fable!
Only babes and fools believe it
In an age that can't conceive it.
Little Jesu—have the ages
Proved the critics fools or sages?
Make them wise in children's way—
Give them back their Christmas Day."

The amount of confused thinking which has gone to the making of this little verse is surely obvious. Are we seriously asked to suppose that the patient labours of scholars upon the subject-matter of the New Testament have earned for them nothing better than the appellation of 'fools,' and does the writer sincerely imagine that those for whom the literal truth of the story remains in doubt have thereby

forfeited the wisdom of the childlike heart, and have lost their Christmas Day? What if, unlike a brilliant exponent of the modern Anglo-Catholic outlook in Oxford, we are unwilling to base our belief in the Incarnation upon the non-discovery of a papyrus establishing the paternity of Joseph? For the Modernist, at any rate, belief in Christ rests upon a foundation less speculative, and withal more firmly laid.

What then must be the attitude of the preacher towards the second class? He must tell them that while they are right in their assumption that the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth of Jesus have no inseparable connection, while they are entirely justified in suspending judgment upon a question as to which the historical evidence is altogether indecisive, yet they must clearly recognise on the one hand the tribute to the greatness of Jesus which the mere presence of such a story involves, and on the other the challenge to a personal decision for or against the acceptance of the claims of Christ, by which they, no less than their more conservatively minded contemporaries, are necessarily confronted. While on many matters besides that of the Virgin Birth suspension of judgment and a wise unwillingness to dogmatise may be laudable and even imperative for the truth-loving Christian, the claim of Christ to the control of human life—individual, social, international, is not one which permits an attitude of nicely poised neutrality. The issue is clear and unconfused. Between whole-hearted acceptance, and a rejection total and complete, there is no middle way.

Members of the third class are more likely to be found outside the walls of a church than within them. These not only see in the story a stumbling-block in the way of their belief in a genuinely human Jesus, but they suppose (unfortunately not without reason) that their attitude of frank rejection renders them abhorrent in the eyes of the orthodox, many of whom would bluntly deny the very name of Christian to all who cannot accept unequivocally this corner-stone, as they regard it, of the Catholic Faith. Not long ago the position was crudely though vigorously expressed by a factory worker in the following terms. 'No,' he said, in answer to a time-worn enquiry, 'No, I never go to church. I can't believe the story of the Virgin Birth. And the Church says I'll be damned if I don't!' At the present day many loyal followers of Jesus Christ are hurt and bewildered by the attitude of official orthodoxy on this question. Mr. Harold Anson goes to the root of the matter when he asks: 'Can you imagine the Jesus of the Gospels saying cautiously to some would-be disciple, 'Excuse me, but what do you believe about my mother?'

In this connection there are three considerations which ought certainly to be emphasised.

In the first place, as has been already pointed out, the New Testament knows nothing of the idea that acceptance of the story of the Virgin Birth is to be regarded as essential to belief in the Incarnation. To assert therefore that those who question the literal truth of that story thereby deny that God became man in Christ is indefensible, and the assertion, whenever made, should be

vehemently challenged. To tell a lover of Christ that he is any less a Christian because he finds himself unable to assent without reserve to certain statements as to the manner of Christ's entrance into the world, is both cruel and unjustifiable. Rather let a man study Christ's own tests of discipleship, and so decide the question of his right to bear Christ's name.

In the second place if the New Testament knows nothing of the story of the Virgin Birth as the essential proof of Christ's divinity, and nowhere requires acceptance of that story as a test of discipleship, still less does it show acquaintance with the extraordinary notion that only by means of a conception which took place without the agency of a human father could the sinlessness of Christ be guaranteed. Such an idea is both grotesque in itself and scientifically ridiculous. Moreover, it casts a wholly unmerited slur upon the beauty of human parentage, and makes the victory of Christ over temptation a mere worthless demonstration on the part of one who conquered where we fail because he was the possessor of weapons which are withheld from other men. Orthodoxy itself requires belief in the complete humanity of Jesus, and those who believe the story of his birth to be literally as well as spiritually true, must see to it that for them also the perfection of that humanity remains unimpaired. They have no right to read into the story meanings and implications unknown to those who first believed it, still less to lay upon the shoulders of Christ's would-be disciples a heavy burden of distress and uncertainty, of a kind which

no honest servant of the Master should be required to bear.

In the third place, therefore, it should be made perfectly clear that the attitude of those who question the literal truth of the story of the birth of Jesus is not one which calls for shame-faced apology. Never for a moment must they grow doubtful of their right to the name of Christian, nor imagine themselves dishonest or disloyal because they cannot agree at all points with those who claim to be orthodox. Rather let them centre their thoughts upon Christ and his requirements, confident that where there is life-long service in the cause of truth, the journey's end will find the truth-seeker richer in faith, hope, and love by virtue of his quest.

Easter no less than Christmas has its difficulties for the ordinary man, difficulties of which it is the preacher's business to be aware, difficulties which it is his highest privilege to try to remove. Just as Christmas for many minds is connected inseparably with the story of the Virgin Birth, so Easter for the great majority of Christians has no meaning apart from the story of the Empty Tomb and the physical resurrection of Jesus. Here also there are the three classes of believers. There are those for whom the whole meaning of Easter hinges upon the truth of the Empty Tomb. Those who have come to understand that the fact of the living Christ does not stand or fall with the restoration to life of the crucified body. And those for whom the alleged 'resurrection' of that body is a definite stumbling-block to a reasonable faith.

It is clearly desirable that those in the first class should at least be brought to recognise the truth of the position occupied by those in the second. However strong the evidence in support of the Empty Tomb, it is not in that evidence alone that the Easter faith has its abiding and joyous assurance. The late Mr. Guy Thorne's volume, *When it was Dark*, for which the present Bishop of London thought well to write a commendation, was in point of fact a mischievous production, inasmuch as it served to strengthen in the popular mind the mistaken belief that were evidence actually forthcoming to prove that the body of Jesus had seen corruption, then the whole edifice of historical Christianity would come crashing to the ground. Even if we admit that St. Paul himself believed the story of the Empty Tomb, it is yet abundantly evident that his faith in the living Christ in no way depended upon that story, but was rooted and grounded in a life-transforming personal experience of unforgettable vividness.

With the third class the modern preacher, if he has taken the trouble honestly to acquaint himself with the difficulties of those who compose it, will feel at any rate some measure of sympathy. And he will withstand stoutly any inclination on the part of the orthodox to brand them as heretics or to deny to them the name of Christian. Moreover, he will admit the impossibility of piecing together into a consistent narrative all the stories of the resurrection appearances of Jesus which the Gospels contain, conceding frankly the presence of legendary elements in some at least of the different accounts.

At the same time he will appeal insistently for two things. First, a willingness on the side of the doubters to refrain from denials, and to await with patience the results of further study and research. And secondly, a clear and emphatic recognition on the part of all Christians that, be the difficulties in the way of the complete understanding of the New Testament narratives what they may, the very life and effectiveness of the Christian Church are dependent upon the close and life-transmitting fellowship of his disciples with their living Lord.

Of the message of Ascension Day, with its apparent emphasis upon an absent Christ, the man in the pew can ordinarily make but little, and that little is confused and clouded by the gross materialism of popular hymns, and the circumstance that Elijah's whirlwind journey to heaven (an event alike legendary and irrelevant) is brought to his attention as an alleged parallel, in some sort at any rate, to the ascension of Jesus. Moreover, some of the proper psalms, and particularly Psalm cx., present a conception of kingship in character utterly remote in its barbaric crudity from every quality of love and service of which the life and teaching of the real Jesus were the matchless expression. All the talk of thrones, crowns, sceptres, all the pomp and pageantry, all the display and lavish magnificence inseparable from the life of an oriental court, and once at any rate beloved by the common folk—all this has now become flagrantly unreal, if not positively repellent, while suggesting inevitably (as Mr. Studdert Kennedy has forcibly reminded us) that God and Jesus Christ are 'out

of it all,' remote from the horrors of a suffering world, and therefore placidly unconcerned with the problems, the sins, the daily interests of the ordinary man. An insistence upon the abiding presence of the living Jesus, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever, a Jesus whose glory is that not of earthly magnificence increased a thousandfold, but of redemptive and empowering suffering, whose only crown is the crown of thorns, whose only sovereignty is the sovereignty of all-conquering love—that can alone make real the vital meaning of the Ascension as the indispensable condition of the larger influence and wider activity of the eternal Christ.

Even when all this has been admitted, the mind of the ordinary man is still very far from clear. For him seemingly subtle distinctions between literal and spiritual truth are an unfailing source of confused thinking, and in the present instance the fact that the Ascension story assumes a pre-Copernican universe, constructed after the manner of a three-storied house, makes it difficult for him to disentangle the essential significance of that story from the setting of primitive beliefs in which it is presented to the reader in the New Testament narrative. Unless the preacher is exceptionally careful in his exposition, the man in the pew will gain from the teaching of Ascension Day little more than an unreal view of heaven, a vague belief in a 'glorified' Jesus, remote and unapproachable, together with an uncomfortable conviction that Orthodoxy requires him to believe not only that the body of Jesus was literally raised from the earth before the eyes of the wondering disciples, but that

his return as Judge will be effected by a visible reversal of the Ascension process.

Another of the tragedies of popular Orthodoxy is the association in the minds of the majority between the coming of the Holy Spirit and a miraculous albeit wholly unnecessary display of linguistic talent on the part of Galilean fishermen. Before the truth of Whit Sunday can be adequately brought home to the minds and hearts of a Christian congregation, the ground must first be cleared by a simple statement on the part of the preacher to the effect that the 'speaking with tongues,' of which we learn in the second chapter of Acts was (in the opinion of all modern scholars) a phenomenon akin to that of which St. Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians, having in point of fact nothing at all to do with 'the gift of divers languages,' of which mention is made in the proper Preface. It is at least matter for satisfaction that whatever be the ultimate form of the revised Prayer Book, *that* stumbling-block will at least have been removed from the path of the simple Christian believer. The change in the wording of the Preface is at once a welcome sign of the advance of Modernist thought, and a cogent proof, if proof were needed, that the Modernist, far from desiring (as is still sometimes asserted) the intellectualisation of Christianity, is in fact working untiringly for its simplification in the interests of truth, and for the liberation of the Christian in the street from the cramping shackles of an unintelligent orthodoxy.

The teaching of Whit Sunday, with its insistence upon the empowering presence of the spirit of Jesus in the hearts of individuals and in the life of the

whole Christian Fellowship, should prove, when freed from irrelevant and confusion-making accretions, readily intelligible to the man in the pew. The modern preacher, following the teaching of Acts, and the clear indications of the discourses of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, should not shrink from St. Paul's frank identification of 'the Lord' with 'the Spirit.' The core of the Whit Sunday message is surely this, that the spirit which once manifested itself in the life and activities of Jesus of Nazareth, is now that 'spirit which is called Christ,' so that the guidance, the direction, the very mind and judgment of Jesus himself are available for his disciples of the twentieth century, and gloriously applicable to the unnumbered problems, whether individual or corporate, of modern life. The activities of the Holy Spirit provide the key to a right understanding of the Ascension, and the two cannot properly be considered apart.

The effect on the ordinary man of Trinity Sunday will be, according to his temperament, either that of heightened exasperation or increased apathy. The teaching given from numberless pulpits is Tritheism naked and unashamed. The recitation of the Athanasian Creed with its 'bad temper' and unsparing use of technical theological terms, which to those unacquainted with their history and altered significance necessarily convey a meaning not seldom diametrically opposite to that intended, leaves the average worshipper either befogged and irritated, or unintelligently belligerent in the defence of a document which he does not understand. In cases where the preacher feels himself unequal to

the task of intelligible exposition, he is prone to fall back on the unhelpful assertion that the doctrine of the Trinity is a 'mystery,' thus committing the double offence of misusing flagrantly a New Testament term which connoted originally not a hidden truth, but its precise opposite, a truth revealed, and at the same time exalting unthinking and effortless credulity as a Christian virtue.

The purpose of the Modernist must be twofold. First, on the question of the relations which are alleged by Orthodoxy to exist within the Godhead, he will recommend an attitude of wise agnosticism, asserting with the Dean of St. Paul's, that 'for purposes of devotion the Persons of the Blessed Trinity are indistinguishable.' And secondly, as occasion offers, he will attempt to show the processes of thought by which the doctrine attained its present form, emphasising on the one hand its growth out of the threefold experience of Christians of God, of the historical Jesus, and of the eternal Christ, and endeavouring on the other to remove where possible unnecessary stumbling-blocks connected with the popular and altogether erroneous use of technical theological terms such as 'Person' and 'Substance.' For practical purposes the Modernist could rest content with the answer given in the Anglican Catechism to the question, 'What dost thou chiefly learn in these Articles of thy Belief?' 'First, I learn to believe in God the Father who hath made me and all the world. Secondly, in God the Son who hath redeemed me, and all mankind. Thirdly, in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me, and all the elect people of God.' Or equally, he could be satisfied

with the exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity put forward by Canon Wilson, to the effect that 'the Godhead . . . speaks to us men in three ways, through three mouth-pieces, with three voices. He speaks to us through Creation; He speaks to us through Christ; He speaks to us through our Conscience. . . . Three voices, one God.' Such an explanation may not be orthodox; indeed it might not improperly be branded as heretical. But at least it makes sense, and has its roots in the deep places of Christian experience. If it is not orthodox, it is assuredly true!

This chapter having dealt with some of the problems by which the work of the modern preacher is necessarily beset, may well conclude with some courageous words of the Bishop of Durham, words which occur in his *Liberty of Prophesying*, a volume consisting of lectures on preaching delivered in America in 1909. Dr. Henson writes:

'The preacher who is inwardly convinced of the truth of the "new learning" must at whatever cost of embarrassment and unpopularity bring his teaching into harmony with it, and leave the consequences in the hands of that God of Truth who may never be served by any form of falsehood.'

[1] *Christ's Thought of God*, by James M. Wilson, D.D. Macmillan. 1920.

# Chapter X.

## Creed and Reunion.

### (An Examination of the Lambeth Basis.)

'Nobody is the master of my faith, and I desire to be master of the faith of no one. I love any man whom I can help, and I call him brother whether he be Jew or Samaritan. I cannot belong to any separate sect, bnt I believe in a holy Christlike Church, a fellowship of saints, and I hold as my brother, my neighbour, my flesh and blood all men who belong to Christ among all sects, faiths and peoples scattered throughout the whole world only I allow nobody to have dominion over the one place which I am pledged to the Lord to keep as pure virgin, namely my heart and my conscience. If you try to bind my conscience, to rule over my faith, or to be master of my heart, then I must leave you. Except *that* everything I am or have is thine, whoever thou art, or whatever thou mayest believe.'—*Sebastian Frank,* b. 1499.

'The Creed is properly to be regarded as the register of beliefs based on Christian experience, verifiable afresh to every generation because the experience, is continuing, and providing thus, in so far as those beliefs are verifiable, a sufficient test of personal discipleship. The Apostles' Creed, then, *in so far as it is verifiable in Christian experience,* may serve the modern Church as a test of the preacher's personal discipleship, because the honest profession of the Apostles' Creed must imply a personal experience which authenticates its religious affirmations, so far of course as they are properly capable of authentication. Where the statements of the Creed are not capable of authentication

in personal experience, they must be held to have no abiding spiritual importance, and accordingly their acceptance ought not to be insisted upon as indispensable in the Christian, whether preacher or layman.'—*Dr. Hensley Henson, Bishop of Durham. The Liberty of Prophesying, p.* 79.

*A.* 'We acknowledge all those who (1) believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and (2) have been baptized into the name of the Holy Trinity, as sharing with us membership in the universal Church of Christ which is His Body.'

*B.* 'We believe that the visible unity of the Church will be found to involve the whole-hearted acceptance of:—

(1) The Holy Scriptures as the record of God's revelation of Himself to man, and (2) as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith; and (3) the Creed commonly called Nicene as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith; and (4) either it or the Apostles' Creed as the Baptismal confession of belief; (5) The divinely instituted sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion as expressing for all the corporate life of the whole fellowship in and with Christ; (6) A ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also (7) the commission of Christ, and (8) the authority of the whole body.'—*Lambeth Conference Report*, 1920.

Is Reunion possible on the basis suggested by the Bishops? In A. 'all those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ' are (with one additional proviso) accepted as members of the universal Church. Omitting for the moment the consideration of that proviso, we may ask: What is the precise significance of the words, 'all those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ'? A. is concerned not with 'Churches,'

or 'Communions,' or 'Bodies,' but with individuals. It would seem, therefore, if A. (1) stood alone, that the individual, provided he makes his profession of belief in Christ in good faith, is *ipso facto* to be reckoned a member of the universal Church without further question as to the exact implications of that belief. Here Creed is reduced to New Testament requirements. The honest desire to make the confession is regarded as the sole and sufficient credal test.

A. (2) however, makes the further requirement of Baptism 'into the name of the Holy Trinity.' Such Baptism may take place either in infancy or in adult life with the conscious consent of the recipient. Where Baptism has been administered, and where there is the personal acknowledgment of belief in Jesus Christ, there membership in the universal Church is to be recognised. We are still within the range of New Testament demands.

But what of the words 'into the name of the Holy Trinity'? It is true that they find support in the present text of the first Gospel. Matthew xxviii. 19 attributes to the risen Christ the use of the so-called Trinitarian formula. But, as is well known, modern criticism of the New Testament has placed a question mark after the words, and few scholars now regard them as genuine. From the nature of the case no final settlement of the question can ever be possible. The most that can be said is that *perhaps* the words were spoken by Christ. Unless, therefore, the Bishops accept the doctrine of verbal inspiration, unless the relatively early use of a formula is to make it binding

upon all future generations, unless the careful conclusions of modern scholarship are to be openly flouted, unless Christ is to be credited with the desire to make discipleship dependent upon a form of words, it is intolerable that a man's right to membership in the Church should be conditioned either by the unconscious acceptance of a formula in infancy, or by an unthinking acceptance of it in adult life, or even by his ability to weigh the evidence with an impartial mind, and to accept conscientiously the conservative verdict as to its origin and authenticity.

A., then, for all its apparent moderation in the matter of credal requirements, is vitiated by a rigid insistence not merely upon Baptism (a practice which, whatever its supposed value, can at least claim the support of the primitive Church), but upon Baptism 'into the name of the Holy Trinity.' So to insist is 'to make more fundamentals than Christ made,' and to exclude from membership in the universal Church not merely the Quaker, by whom Baptism as an outward act is altogether rejected, but all those whose honest conviction makes it impossible for them to accept the Trinitarian formula as the natural expression of their belief. The stress laid upon the formula in A. so obtrudes itself upon our notice that neither the man who came to Baptism in adult life, nor the man who having been baptized in infancy, desired seriously to consider the intellectual honesty of his position, could possibly disregard its challenge.

When A. is considered in relation to B. (3) and B. (4) the seeming compatibility even of A. (1)

with the New Testament is seen to be altogether illusory. If 'the Creed commonly called Nicene' is to be regarded as 'the sufficient statement of the Christian faith,' it must follow that 'belief in our Lord Jesus Christ' entails, in the minds of the Bishops, an *ex animo* acceptance of all the clauses therein contained. This conclusion is rendered indubitable by the further requirement that either the Nicene or the Apostles' Creed be accepted as the Baptismal confession of belief. The confession at Baptism is made by the individual either in his own person or by the mouth of sureties. It therefore follows that the individual's confession of belief is regarded as unsatisfactory unless it be formulated in the terms of the Apostles' Creed. While it is not required of the candidate for Baptism that he shall repeat the metaphysical subtleties of the *Homoousion*, since the phrase 'of one substance with the Father' finds no place in the more primitive of the two creeds, he must nevertheless commit himself unreservedly to a belief in the story of the Virgin Birth, as well as to the acceptance of a number of other propositions, the precise meaning of which the candidate, unless he is a theological student, is not in a position to determine. Thus the simple formula of 'belief in our Lord Jesus Christ' is found on examination to involve the wholesale adoption of a series of statements neither readily intelligible in themselves, when taken in their literal meaning, nor in any sense capable of rigorous proof. When I assert my belief that Jesus 'suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried,' there is no doubt either in my

own mind or in the minds of others as to what I mean. But when I am asked to say further of this same Jesus that 'he descended into hell; the third day rose again from the dead; ascended into heaven; sits on the right hand of God; and from thence shall come to judge the quick and the dead,' I am obviously committing myself to a number of assertions, the language of which is clearly figurative and symbolical, so that while half a dozen people may all make the same assertions in equally good faith, there can from the nature of the case be no possible guarantee that the meaning which they ascribe to those assertions is even approximately identical. Our argument is not that these assertions are false, still less that symbolical language is without value as a vehicle of truth. At the same time in cases where the meaning which may be ascribed to the same words is capable of the widest possible variation, it is surely unprofitable to demand the bare recitation of those words as the essential condition of membership in the Church of Christ.

At this point we are driven back upon B. (1) and B. (2). With B. (1) we need have but small quarrel. To be asked to regard the Holy Scriptures as 'the record of God's revelation of Himself to man' is a requirement sufficiently elastic, and one which commits him who accepts it to no theory of infallibility, to no specific doctrine of inspiration. Whether the words have behind them a tacit refusal to admit divine revelation through other channels than those of Jewish and Christian writings, we need not stay to enquire.

B. (2) on the other hand requires our close attention. Here we are bidden to accept Scripture as 'the rule and ultimate standard of faith.' In this requirement the Bishops stand in line with the Anglican Articles. Article 6 states explicitly 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the Faith.' Article 8 is responsible for the assertion that 'the three Creeds . . . ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.' It would seem that the Bishops are in agreement with both Articles. This being the case, it is unnecessary to discuss here the Anglo-Catholic contention that the authority of the Creeds is independent of and superior to the authority of the New Testament. For the Bishops Creeds and Scripture stand or fall together, and the assumption of Article 8 remains unquestioned. From this it follows that credal statements must be regarded as open to exactly the same methods of criticism as statements of Scripture. Apart, therefore, from the doctrine of an infallible Bible, neither Articles 6 and 8 (which pre-suppose that doctrine) nor the statement of B. (2), based avowedly as it is upon those Articles, can be regarded as rigorously binding upon Christians in the present day. We have of course no desire to minimise the true value of the New Testament. But the position will become intolerable if the acceptance of Scripture as 'the rule and ultimate standard of faith' is taken to

involve a wholesale and undiscriminating adhesion to every statement therein contained. Membership in the universal Church must not be made to depend upon an unenviable capacity for accepting without question either the contents of the New Testament as a whole, or even such venerable summaries of New Testament incidents and teaching as are found in the historic Creeds.

The precise significance of B. (5) is not immediately apparent. Clearly both Baptism and Holy Communion are, and always have been (in ideal at any rate) sacraments of fellowship; clearly too they go back to the New Testament, and in their dramatic simplicity still commend themselves to the great majority of Christians as suitable expressions of the corporate life of the community 'in and with Christ.' But what is meant by the words 'divinely instituted'? If they express the conviction of the Bishops that both Baptism and the Lord's Supper were explicitly enjoined upon his followers by the direct command of the historical Jesus, then, however much the majority may be inclined to agree with that conviction, it must yet be confessed that we are brought back once again into the region of critical conjecture and divergent estimates of available evidence.

Some New Testament students, after a careful examination of the whole question, have arrived at the conclusion that Christ instituted no sacrament. Their case is a good one, and be they right or wrong, their contention is not one which ought lightly to be ignored. The utterances of a university lecturer who cannot be accused of undervaluing

the institutional side of Christianity, are in this connection of the highest significance. He writes:[1]

'Let me next say a word about the distinction so commonly drawn between Baptism and the Eucharist as the two great sacraments of the Gospel, and other so-called lesser sacraments and sacramentals. The distinction is not, as I think, one of very great value. It dates, so far as I know, from the Reformation, and is based on a favourite idea of the Reformers, *viz.* that the two sacraments in question were "generally necessary to salvation" and "instituted by Christ Himself" in a sense in which others were not. Both these points, as I think, have been gravely affected by criticism. In what sense are the sacraments "generally necessary to salvation"? Not surely in a sense which would exclude the "salvation" of Quakers. In what sense were they historically "instituted by Christ Himself"? Who shall say? . . . The sacraments, as I think, are to be interpreted not in the light of their historical origins (about which in most cases, to be frank, we know singularly little), but rather in the light of what they have come to be, and of the part which they have actually played in the life of the Church.'

In view of a statement of this kind from one who is at once a scholar and a High Churchman, it is surely unwise to insist upon the divine origin of Baptism and Holy Communion, unless the Bishops' words may be taken as meaning no more than this, that any practice which has proved its value in Christian experience may properly be regarded as 'divinely instituted.'

Quite apart, however, from the vexed question of origins, some are found to maintain that the actual words of Jesus of Nazareth, even could we

[1] *Studies in Historical Christianity*, by A. E. J. Rawlinson, B.D., p. 47.

be reasonably sure that we had them, would not be *ipso facto* binding upon all Christians. If Christ, they say, commanded Baptism as an outward act, if he instituted the Holy Communion as a formal service to be repeated simply because he willed it, above all if he made participation in these rites an unalterable condition of discipleship in every age, then he is less truly Christ than the Christ within, inconsistent alike with the Gospel portrait as a whole and with the deepest convictions of an increasing number of those who would follow him to-day. Here too the case is a good one, deserving of respect and consideration.

But of all this the Bishops say no word. If they are aware of the opinions of others, they keep their knowledge to themselves. In this instance also the episcopal attitude requires for its justification the doctrine of biblical infallibility. It is true that the demand for 'whole-hearted acceptance' would not seem to carry with it the further requirement of any specific theory of the nature and effects of the two sacraments said to have been 'divinely instituted' (except so far as such a theory may be thought to be involved in the acceptance of Scripture as 'the rule and ultimate standard of faith') nevertheless we are undeniably committed to an estimate of the New Testament evidence of such a kind as shall lead to agreement with the Bishops' own conclusions as to the origin of both Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

B. (6), (7) and (8) require as a condition of visible unity the acceptance by the whole Church of 'a ministry possessing not only the inward call of

the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body.' Questions of re-ordination and its inplications do not come within the scope of this chapter. But the common sense of the plain man will find it difficult, if not impossible, to follow the Bishops in the subtle distinction which they have drawn between 'the inward call of the Spirit' (admittedly genuine) and the commission of Christ. To St. Paul at any rate the suggested contrast would have appeared meaningless. Where the call of the Spirit is recognised by the whole body, it is surely foolish, nay impossible, to require more. Rather would it be true to say, Call and Commission are inseparable and one and the same.

It will be evident that the basis of visible unity proposed by the Bishops is primarily intellectual. If neither Church nor Bible is to be regarded as an infallible authority (for though their position seems logically to require it, the claim of infallibility is nowhere explicitly asserted), it follows that membership in the universal Church involves for the episcopal mind the acceptance of a number of intellectual propositions. Now from the nature of the case ability to judge of the truth or even of the relative certainty of these propositions can be gained only by a specialised training in Theology. The genuineness of the Trinitarian formula in Matthew xxviii., the precise meaning and probable degree of literal or symbolical truth to be assigned to this or that article of the Creed, the strength of an argument for or against the trustworthiness of a New Testament narrative or saying, by reliance

on which a doctrine is held to be proved, the nature of the evidence for a 'divinely instituted' sacrament, the explicit meaning to be attached to the phrase 'the commission of Christ' as the requisite of a valid ministry—here are matters for the specialists, matters on which they alone are competent to pronounce judgment, matters wherein the widest differences of opinion admittedly prevail.

In face of disagreement among the theological experts, what is the position of the ordinary man? Many no doubt will remain content with the virtual acceptance of an infallible Church, or an infallible Bible, or an infallible Lambeth Conference, and so remaining, will get on as best they can with the practical business of the Christian life. But in the present day there are many also for whom infallibility is a meaningless conception. To them the Bishops' pronouncements will bring little comfort. 'If you make the truth of Christianity dependent upon historical evidence,' says Professor Bacon, 'you close the Kingdom of Heaven against all but critical experts.' This in reality is what the Bishops would seek to do. But now that infallibility has gone, all justification for the episcopal attitude goes with it. This the ordinary man, the Christian in the street, knows quite well; and so far he is wiser than the Lambeth Fathers, clinging desperately, as they still do in effect, to the irrational conception of an infallible Creed built upon the foundation of a fallible Bible.

Multitudes to-day who are neither qualified to enter the lists against the Bishops nor desirous of doing so, are yet uncomfortably conscious that on

all these questions as to which the Episcopate has expressed its mind more than one opinion is possible. This consciousness creates in them an unwillingness to accept any set of intellectual propositions, however intrinsically probable, at the bidding of the Bishops, and as the price of acknowledged membership in the Christian Society. Many would make their own the words of the late Dr. Sanday: 'Truth imposed, or truth that a man is compelled to *say*, is to me no truth at all;' they recognise, as the Bishops seemingly do not, 'that the things which are essential to salvation are clear and luminous;' to them 'the easy acceptance of masked words in lieu of thinking' seems but a poor substitute for a faith beaten out upon the anvil of experience amid the fires of doubt.

The prevalence of this temper in an increasing number of persons whose loyalty to Christ is passionate and unimpeachable, together with the existence of such a body as the Society of Friends, who while accepting neither credal statements, sacraments, nor the ministry of ordained persons, as of the essence of Christianity, yet manifest the fruit of the Spirit in full measure, must surely lead to the vehement questioning of the proposed basis of Christian unity. By the rigid Protestant armed to the teeth with an infallible Bible, by the no less rigid Catholic relying implicitly upon the official pronouncements of an infallible Church, these episcopal propositions may be readily accepted, but for those for whose minds short-cuts to certainty are impossible because lacking in rational justification, and unsupported by the testimony of

experience, there is no alternative but the decisive rejection of the suggested tests. Were the evidence for the statements of Creed or Bible ten times as strong as their most ardent supporter would dare to affirm, were the scholarship of orthodox Bishops a hundredfold more illustrious than the most staunch admirer of the Episcopate would declare it to be, the principle would remain unchanged and unchangeable. The proposal to demand 'the whole-hearted acceptance' of certain critical conclusions with reference to the documents of the New Testament as a test of membership in the universal Church cannot in the nature of things lead anywhere but to disaster.

The proposed basis of visible unity will necessarily alienate the thinker and the man of independent mind. Not of course that such persons can prove the critical conclusions of orthodoxy to be in all cases erroneous. But be they right or wrong, their acceptance can of itself provide no adequate foundation upon which to build a re-united Church. We ask from the Bishops something better than 'the tempting and otiose policy of accepting the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds as the standard of faith.'[1] We shall be told in effect, if not in so many words, that the Creeds are infallible, that their acceptance is a *sine qua non* of membership in the Church, that while critical methods may be allowed in the study of the New Testament, they must not lead to critical results which go further than those which the Bishops have thought well to accept. And to all this we shall reply: 'Your basis is wrong.

[1] H. D. A. Major in the *Modern Churchman* for January, 1921.

It is theological rather than religious, intellectual rather than spiritual, involving logically the impossible conception of an infallible authority, vested either in Church or Bible. We do not ask you to whittle down the claims of Christ; we demand no irreducible minimum of formally stated beliefs, by the acceptance of which visible unity may be obtained. Our claim is rather for a new basis, a basis in conformity with the mind of Christ, a test of discipleship such as he required, a unity not of organisation, not of formal profession, but a unity of spirit issuing in common action for the accomplishment of a common end.'

Criticism is admittedly an easier task than construction. If the old basis of unity has been wrong, what can be said more precisely of the new basis which should take its place? Canon Quick, in an article on *Faith and Creeds*[1], has rightly pointed out the unsatisfactory nature of a *moral* test as a condition of membership in the Christian Church. 'It is unthinkable,' he writes, 'that the friend of publicans and sinners could wish his followers to extract from anyone the performance of any moral requirement *before* they extend to him their fellowship.' It therefore follows, he tells us, that 'the initial test of Christianity must be concerned with a man's faith as distinct from any kind of works.' This is well enough. Obviously a test of moral *achievement* would be intolerable. But a man's living faith, the hidden loyalties which give driving power to his work, and provide an underlying unity of purpose for thought and

[1] In the *Challenge* of January 7th, 1921.

action, have very little to do with the recitation of a formal creed. It is impossible to suppose for a moment that the friend of publicans and sinners could wish to confront a would-be disciple with the clauses of the Apostles' Creed, demanding their 'whole-hearted acceptance' as a condition of welcome. This it is which Canon Quick appears to forget. The basis of visible unity can have nothing to do with an unbroken Decalogue (so far Canon Quick is right), but still less is it a matter of credal uniformity. Better the smug satisfaction of the Pharisee than the glib, unthinking orthodoxy of the gabbler of Creeds.

'The ultimate cleavage,' writes Mr. H. G. Wood in a recent volume of essays,[1] 'is coming not over particular articles of the Apostles' Creed, but over the value we set on the history and person of Jesus . . . The ultimate parting of the ways turns on the question whether a man's faith is Christ-centred or not.' These words we believe to be profoundly true. The test of membership in a reunited Church must be one not of Creed, in the sense of intellectual conformity to a set of propositions imposed from outside, nor of works, in the sense of ethical conformity to a code of commandments; it must be a test rather of love for Christ, of participation in his spirit, of enthusiasm for his scale of values, of loyalty to his clear intention. The expressed desire to bear Christ's name and to do his work should be the sufficient passport to membership in Christ's Church.

[1] *The Unity of Western Civilisation*, edited by F. S. Marvin. Essay xiii.

Can that Church be held together by links so intangible? At least the experiment ought to be tried. They are the only links which Christ himself has forged, and we have no right to distrust them until we have put them to the test. Still less must we seek to forge others and try to rivet them as chains upon the minds and consciences of Christ's disciples.

# Chapter XI.

## Jesus and the Eucharist.

The Anglican Bishops have given it as their opinion that part of the essential basis of a united Church must be 'the whole-hearted acceptance of the divinely instituted sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion as expressing for all the corporate life of the whole fellowship in and with Christ.'

What is the attitude of the Modernist to such a demand? If he resents its wording, it is not that he desires to belittle sacraments, or to question at all the validity of the sacramental principle as such. He is fully aware how naturally and inevitably spiritual truth is mediated through material channels, and the experience of the centuries has taught him how large a place the sacraments have actually occupied in the affections and worship of countless numbers of the followers of Christ. He recognises to the full the necessity of the institutional element in religion, and is able to appreciate both the devotional and disciplinary value of corporate acts of religious worship, acts which serve to link the present with the past, and to emphasise the worldwide character of the Christian fellowship. Moreover he is by no means blind to the appeal of a dramatic presentation of religious truth, nor to the flexibility of interpretation which attaches

inevitably to participation in sacramental rites. For these reasons the Modernist no less than others is eager that the great sacraments of the Church shall be profitably used and honourably esteemed.

But he would go further and desire not only the reverent use of sacraments, but no less an intelligent understanding of their historical origin, their primitive significance, their present value. He would have the instructed Christian recognise to the full how many and intricate are the problems which cluster round the seemingly simple rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. If a man esteems the sacraments, he must know why he esteems them, he must be capable of thinking out what are the truths of which they are the visible expression, and what is the true character of the grace or help which they may be said to bring to those who use them aright. Unthinking acceptance of the sacraments the Modernist frankly repudiates as superstition, mental laziness, spiritual cowardice. Having listened recently to a lecture on the doctrine of the Eucharist given by an Anglo-Catholic teacher in one of our universities, the writer asked the question, 'How far do you think such teaching could be so expressed that the ordinary man would be able to think it out for himself?' And the answer was promptly given, 'I'm not sure that I want the ordinary man to think.' It is precisely this cynical attitude of distrust which Modernists so deeply deplore. To say of Baptism or Holy Communion, 'It is a mystery to be accepted without question,' is to utter a foolish impiety, which possesses not even the doubtful merit of embodying a half-truth.

The spirit of adventurous enquiry belongs to the very genius of Christianity, and to love God with the mind is no less a part of the Christian's obligation than to love him with heart and soul.

Now it is precisely the results of honest and impartial investigation which the Lambeth Basis would appear to ignore. And when the suggestion is made that the two 'divinely instituted sacraments' must inevitably form part of any basis of visible unity, there is at least the implication that in the words 'divinely instituted' we have the all-sufficient reason for their compulsory observance.

But scholar and plain man alike will resent so arbitrary and cavalier a treatment of the whole question. For the scholar is well enough acquainted with the intricate questions raised by any disinterested study of sacramental origins and interpretation, and Christians who make no claim to scholarship are yet sufficiently cognisant of the mind and spirit of the historical Jesus to see the impropriety of attributing to him the demand for an unreasoning observance of rites and ceremonies. Nor at heart could they be loyal to a God who was believed capable of sympathy with so poor a justification for the continuance of religious practices.

In the present chapter we shall be concerned only with the Eucharist. But, *mutatis mutandis*, the same problems, the same uncertainty as to historical origins, the same distinction between primitive significance and present value, will be found to exist also in the case of Baptism.

In what sense then can it be affirmed that the

service of Holy Communion was actually instituted by Jesus as a permanent rite binding upon the whole Church? All four Gospels contain the account of a farewell meal, a Last Supper, shared by Jesus with the little inner circle of his disciples on the night preceding his death. In the first three, but not in the fourth, we have also a narrative of what is commonly known as the institution of the Eucharist or Lord's Supper. Moreover, in 1 Corinthians xi. Paul gives a similar account of the institution, an account which he claims to have 'received from the Lord,' and in the previous chapter he writes incidentally of the Supper in its relation to similar meals connected with contemporary heathenism. Further, in Acts ii. and xx. there are references to the breaking of bread which may be thought to stand in some undefined relation to what happened in the Upper Room. In the Fourth Gospel, again, chapter vi. gives a long discourse in which Jesus is represented as the Bread of Life, and it is not improbable that the teaching here placed in the mouth of the historical Jesus reflects controversies which had arisen in connection with the Christian observance of the Lord's Supper. In no other book of the New Testament is there any reference whatever to the sacrament of Holy Communion. And it is at least noteworthy that of the words attributed to our Lord at the institution of the rite only four, 'This is my body,' are found, according to the true text, to be common to all the accounts.

In point of time the earliest account of the institution is that of Paul, written about A.D. 55.

It appears that the celebration of the rite at Corinth had given rise to grave scandals, news of which had come to the ears of the Apostle. Evidently the actual celebration was intimately connected with a common meal shared by all the members of the community, a meal to which each brought his own contribution both of food and drink. At one point during the meal, or possibly at more than one, a special cup was drunk by all, and a special loaf broken and shared, perhaps with the repetition of the words and acts of Jesus which Paul enumerates. Mutual fellowship was obviously part of the significance of this common meal, and Paul complains with reason that any real fellowship had been rendered impossible by the greed and ostentation of the richer members. Seemingly people came in at different times, some ate and drank to excess, others were actually hungry. And such a condition of things was both a mark of disrespect to the Church, and liable to wound the susceptibilities of the poorer Christians. Let ordinary meals, writes Paul, be taken at home. The Lord's Supper, meal though it be, is on a different plane, and its proper celebration is made impossible by the failure of the members of the Church in Corinth to distinguish adequately between ordinary food and food of a sacred and sacramental character.

The words and acts of Jesus as recounted by Paul are familar enough to communicants of all Churches.

'I passed on to you what I received from the Lord himself, namely that on the night he was betrayed the Lord Jesus took a loaf, and after thanking God he broke it, saying, "This means my body broken for you;

do this in memory of me." In the same way he took a cup after supper, saying, "This cup means the new covenant ratified by my blood; as often as you drink it, do it in memory of me." '—MOFFATT'S TRANSLATION.

But what do the words mean, and what impression did they convey to Paul who wrote them and to his readers? It is clear from his immediate comment that Paul thinks of the rite as in some sense a memorial of the death of Jesus. 'For,' he adds, 'as often as you eat this loaf and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he come.' And the 'proclamation' takes the form of an action, so that we may speak not improperly of dramatic representation. It is clear too that when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians xi. he expected this coming of Jesus to be literal, visible and speedy, and regarded the rite as a bridging of the gulf between present and future.

But in order to get further into the heart of our problem we must note what Paul says in the preceding chapter. He is there dealing with a practical question raised by his Corinthian converts. They want to know how far it is legitimate to accept invitations to dinner from non-Christian friends, how far it is permissible to eat meat that has been sacrificed in heathen temples, how far it is right to take part in meals of a religious or semi-religious character. And the answer of Paul throws a flood of light upon contemporary beliefs and practices and the Apostle's attitude towards them.

Admittedly for Paul idols have no actual existence. Yet idolatry is a sin from which his converts are warned to flee, and if Paul did not believe in the

existence of other gods, he believed emphatically, in common with all his contemporaries and with Jesus himself, in the existence of dæmons. And he maintains that food sacrificed in heathen temples is sacrificed to dæmons, and furthermore that the eating of such food and participation in religious meals are a means to actual fellowship, actual spiritual communion with the dæmons themselves.

Such a belief, though strange to us, was common to the whole Graeco-Roman world of Paul's day. The very *raison d'être* of the so-called Mystery Religions was the establishment of fellowship with the divine. Sacramentalism, rites of initiation, purification, communion, were of the essence of these Mystery faiths, by allegiance to which salvation and immortality were believed to be obtainable. And in all alike participation in religious meals held a place, meals the avowed purpose of which was the attainment of a twofold fellowship, first with the deity and secondly with one's fellow guests or worshippers. Moreover, in contrast to the official religion of the State, membership in the Mystery Religions, as in the Christian Church, was open to all irrespective of class or race. The Mysteries were essentially international, the result of a mingling or synthesis of Eastern and Western thought, and for hundreds of years before the coming of Christ the profound ideas of which they were the expression had gripped the imagination of the ancient world.

Thus when Paul writes, 'I do not want you to participate in dæmons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and also the cup of dæmons; you

cannot partake of the table of the Lord and also of the table of dæmons,' he is using language in no merely figurative sense. And his words in explanation of the Christian sacrament make clear beyond question the parallel in Paul's mind between the Christian and heathen rites:

'The cup of blessing, which we bless, is that not participating in the blood of Christ? The bread we break, is that not participating in the body of Christ?'

Here is the same thought of spiritual fellowship attained through the sharing in common of sacred food and drink. And the rite is conceived of in two ways, as an act of communion with the living, exalted, glorified Christ, and equally as a method of cementing the bond of intimate fellowship whereby all members of the Christian community are linked together. The second point is emphasised by the words which immediately follow: 'For many as we are, we are one Bread, one Body, since we all partake of the one Bread.'

There is of course no question of conscious borrowing on the part of Paul, still less of large-minded sympathy with the nobler elements discoverable in the Mystery Religions. But what is evident beyond cavil is Paul's sense of the reality of that which he condemns. For him fellowship with dæmons is as much a possibility as fellowship with the exalted Christ. It is a case of 'Sacrament versus Sacrament: Mystery versus Mystery.' And Christians are called upon to make their choice, a choice as real and definite as that proposed by Elijah to Israel on Mount Carmel. While the different Mystery cults were broadly tolerant of

one another's existence, Paul, in the rigid temper of his Jewish upbringing, offers only a simple alternative, a direct challenge from which there is no escape.

But, as is well known, opposition to an opponent's teaching is no safe barrier against the influence of that teaching upon one's own thought. And when Paul thinks of sacred food and drink as channels of fellowship between Christ and Christians, he is concerned with a body of ideas far older than Christianity, ideas which are common to many primitive faiths, and which go back in their essential content to a past indefinitely remote. To say this is not for a moment to imply that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as Paul regards it, may rightly be placed on a level in ethical and spiritual value either with the contemporary sacraments of his own day, or with those more primitive instances of the same fundamental mode of achieving fellowship with the divine which history reveals to us. The positive value of an institution is not to be gauged by reference to its primitive beginnings, any more than the significance of a Shakespeare can rightly be measured by an allusion to man's ape-like ancestors. At the same time the study of origins cannot rightly be neglected, and the modern science of Comparative Religion has without doubt done much to elucidate the background of early Christian thought, and to lay bare the roots from which many of the pivotal Christian ideas ultimately sprang.

The essential kinship between Paul's more strictly theological interpretation of the Lord's Supper

in 1 Corinthians xi. and his incidental references to its character in the preceding chapter is established by what he says in both places as to the very literal dangers attaching to unworthy reception. And the extent to which the Apostle's mind was saturated with sacramental conceptions of what we can only call a materialistic character is further illustrated by his determination to find in the Old Testament precise parallels to the Christian rite, parallels which, it need scarcely be asserted, are wholly imaginary. When, for example, he speaks of a baptism 'into Moses,' or refers to Israel's participation in common of the same supernatural, or spiritual, food and drink, and even to an actual drinking from a supernatural Rock, which is boldly identified with the pre-existent Christ, it is surely evident that he is carrying back into the story of the wanderings ideas intimately connected in his own mind with his view of the Eucharist and Baptism. Moreover, just as participation in the sacraments of the Old Testament did not of itself serve to render the Israelites immune from divine punishment, even so, argues Paul, is it now.

Thus in chapter x. the Apostle refers explicitly to the Lord's 'jealousy,' which participation in heathen sacraments must inevitably arouse, and to the obvious danger of challenging the exalted Christ to a trial of strength, while in the following chapter he speaks not only of the guilt entailed by a careless reception of the sacrament, and of the condemnation which results from failure to discriminate between a sacred rite and an ordinary meal, but actually of illness and death as the

direct and dire consequences of such an attitude. Here we have left the region of ethical and spiritual penalties, and are dealing rather with materialistic conceptions, to which a host of parallels is easily discoverable in the records of primitive peoples. If Paul sincerely believed in the possibility of physical ills resulting from an unworthy reception of the Lord's Supper, it must be admitted that in certain respects at any rate he has absorbed the less worthy ideas of his pagan environment to a greater extent than he himself would have been likely to admit.

It is noticeable that Paul in 1 Corinthians x. speaks not merely of Christians as by means of the Eucharist participating in Christ, but of participation in the blood and in the body of Christ. And here we ought probably to see the influence of tradition and of the rite as instituted by Jesus in the Upper Room. In his account of the institution of the Supper the Apostle represents Jesus as saying: 'This means my body broken for you. This cup means the new covenant ratified by my blood.' And before asking what Paul himself understood by the words, we must first enquire not only what they meant to Jesus himself and to those in whose presence they were first spoken, but secondly how far the words as quoted by Paul are in fact identical with those originally spoken by Jesus. And it is this second question, and the answer we give to it, which must guide us in any effort to determine our Lord's meaning.

Now a comparison of the words of institution in the first three Gospels will reveal differences of greater or less importance in the three accounts.

Immediately after the announcement of the coming betrayal, Mark has:—

'And as they were eating he took a loaf and after the blessing he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "Take this, it means my body." He also took a cup and, after thanking God, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it; he said to them, "This means my covenant blood which is shed for many; truly I tell you I will never drink the produce of the vine again till the day I drink it new within the Realm of God."' (Mk. xv, 22–25.)

Matthew has a text which is roughly identical, except that he makes Jesus say of the cup: 'This means my blood, the new covenant blood, shed for many to win the remission of their sins,' and that the words 'with you' are added to what is said by Mark about drinking wine in the Realm of God (Mt. xxvi. 26–29).

Luke, on the other hand, has a text which is clearly independent of Mark, whom Matthew follows. He writes:—

'Jesus said to them, "I have longed eagerly to eat this passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will never eat this passover again till the fulfilment of it in the Reign of God." And he took a cup which was handed to him, gave thanks to God and said, "Take this and distribute it among yourselves, for I tell you I will never drink the produce of the vine again till such time as God's Reign comes." Then he took a loaf and after thanking God he broke it and gave it to them saying, "This means my body given up for your sake; do this in memory of me." So too, he gave them the cup after supper saying, "This means the new covenant ratified by my blood shed for your sake. But the hand of my betrayer is on the table beside me."' (Lk. xxii. 15–21.)

Taking this text as it stands, we notice several peculiarities. To begin with, the institution is placed immediately before, instead of directly after, the prediction of the betrayal. In the second place, mention is made of two cups, the earlier of which precedes the reference to the loaf, and in connection with which nothing is said either of blood or of the covenant of which it is the ratification. And, thirdly, Luke, like Paul, represents Jesus as enjoining the continuance of the rite in his memory. The familiar words, 'Do this in memory of me,' are found in connection with the loaf, though not with the second cup, whereas no command of repetition is given either by Mark or Matthew.

But it is well known that important manuscripts of the New Testament omit the second half of verse 19 and the whole of verse 20, and scholars as conservative as Westcott and Hort say of the textual evidence that it leaves 'no moral doubt that the words in question were absent from Luke's original text.' But with the disappearance of these words there disappears also all reference to the second cup, all reference to a connection between the wine and the blood of Jesus, all reference to a repetition of the rite, and all real similarity between the versions of Luke and Paul.

Undoubtedly there is matter here for consideration. If, as most scholars believe, the text of Luke has been assimilated by some copyist to that of Paul in 1 Corinthians, then it will follow that the sole explicit witness for the command to repeat the rite in memory of Jesus is the Apostle Paul. And

it will follow further that, according to one tradition of the institution, the cup had no connection whatever with sacrificial blood or with the inauguration of a new covenant.

A good case at any rate can be made out for the contention that in the breaking of the bread we have the kernel, the 'germ cell,' of the whole rite. It is at least possible that the significance of the cup, as Mark presents it, and its connection with the covenant blood of Jesus, is due to the influence of Paul, in whose theology the idea of Christ's death as a sacrifice is fundamental. In Mark's reference to the bread as meaning the body of Jesus there is no hint of sacrificial language, and the same is true of Luke, for whom the cup also is unconnected with ideas of sacrifice or the shedding of blood. Support to this tradition is given in an early Christian document known as the *Didache,* where the eucharistic prayers are prayers of simple thanksgiving, and perhaps also in the references to the breaking of the bread in Acts ii. and xx., in the Emmaus story, and in the words of Paul already quoted, where he speaks of the community as 'one Bread, one Body, since we all partake of the one Bread.'

Accepting provisionally the suggestion that in the shorter text of Luke we have the nearest approach obtainable to the actual words spoken by Jesus in the Upper Room, what shall we say as to their original meaning? Quite clearly the significance of the cup is that of farewell. If the words are authentic, we must assume on the part of Jesus a clear knowledge of his approaching

death, and no less certainly a conviction of the triumph of God's cause and of ultimate reunion with his friends. All three accounts refer to a drinking of wine by Jesus in the Realm of God, and there can be little doubt that the words are a genuine reminiscence of something which was actually said. While the scene as sketched by Paul contains no reference to the Kingdom of God, the thought of the Parousia, or visible return of Jesus, is clearly connected in his mind with the Lord's Supper, since he regards its celebration as a proclamation, or dramatic showing forth of the Lord's death, 'till he come.'

Jesus then thinks of the Kingdom, or Reign, of God as imminent, and possibly connects its coming with his own death, and with such thoughts in his mind, as Dr. Orchard finely expresses it, 'he pledges his disciples in the holiest toast ever proposed—'the Kingdom!' Here there is no question of a sacrament, no reference to sacrificial blood, no injunction to repeat a sacred rite. What we have is rather a toast of farewell, in which the thought of Jesus is centred not merely nor mainly upon his death, but upon the imminent triumph of the cause of God.

But what is the significance of the broken loaf and of the words, 'This means my body'? First of all, it is well to remind ourselves of the strangeness of the words to modern ears. 'The phraseology of the sacrament bears no relation to ordinary modes of thought.' And as we have already seen, the explanation that the words are a mystery, in the sense of an enigma from the very nature of the

case insoluble, ought certainly to be rejected. For the disciples who heard them the words of Jesus cannot have been taken as an invitation to the literal eating of his body; so much is clear beyond question. No less clear is it that what was said by Jesus must have been intelligible to his first hearers. Yet when we have described the words as 'symbolical,' we are not in reality any nearer to their original meaning. For if it is asserted that the broken bread is symbolical of the body of Jesus which on the morrow was to be broken on the cross, we have still to ask, what is the significance of the act of eating?

The problem, if indeed it is capable of solution at all, must be linked up with yet another question, namely, what was the character of the meal which Jesus shared with his friends on the night before his death? As is well known, the first three Gospels stand in oppposition to the fourth in the matter of the date of the crucifixion. According to the former, Jesus eats the actual passover meal on the Thursday night, and dies on the day following, while according to the latter, Jesus dies on the cross at the time of the sacrificing of the paschal lambs, so that for this Evangelist at least the meal, whatever its character, cannot actually have been the passover supper. While one must accept the Johannine chronology with extreme caution precisely on the ground of the eminently suitable synchronisation of the death of Jesus with the time of the slaying of the passover lambs, it is certainly true that many features even of the

Synoptic narrative seem to make against the strictly paschal character of the Last Supper, and if Hebrew scholars are right in their interpretation of the words of Jesus recorded by Luke only, 'With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer,' then the words indicate a desire strongly felt, but in fact unfulfilled. So that in reality what is actually implied by Jesus is this: 'I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; but I am convinced that before twenty-four hours have passed I shall be dead, and that therefore that desire of mine cannot be fulfilled. Let us then treat *this* meal as if it were the passover. Let me be your lamb. Let this bread which you share in common stand for my body. And let the thought in our minds be that not only of my death, but that also of divine deliverance, a past deliverance of which the passover is the memorial, a future deliverance to be achieved by the speedy coming of the Kingdom of God.'

The above paraphrase is borrowed largely from Professor Kennett of Cambridge who, however, is able to accept also Mark's reference to the wine as a type of the blood shed at the ratification of a covenant, a reference which Luke omits. And whatever may be thought of this interpretation of the words, 'This is my body,' at least it embodies an attempt to give to the words a meaning which could have been understood by those who first heard them, a meaning neither unintelligible nor repulsive to devout Jews. And as Professor Kennett has said, uninformed opinion and fear of being called heretic have combined to produce a remarkable

reticence as to the meaning of the rite when first celebrated in the Upper Room.

When we compare the rite as instituted by Jesus with its interpretation by Paul in 1 Corinthians we are immediately conscious of a change of atmosphere. It is true that the thought of fellowship, and of the Lord's approaching death are present to the minds both of Jesus and of Paul. But here the resemblance would seem to end. Jesus, in thinking of fellowship, looks back to the many meals which he and his have shared, indicating that death itself can cause no real break in the old relationship, since with the imminent coming of the Kingdom that same fellowship will be renewed. Paul, though for him too participation in the Supper cements the fellowship of believers, thinks of an intimate communion with the exalted Christ as actually achieved by the reception of the sacred food. He conceives the death of Christ as a sacrifice offered to God on behalf of Christians. The loaf means the body broken for them. The wine means the new covenant ratified in Christ's blood. And Christians are bidden to repeat the rite in his memory as a dramatic representation of his sacrificial death, as a sacramental act whereby the participants achieve fellowship with one another, and intimate (almost we might say dangerously intimate) spiritual communion with their exalted Lord.

It is noticeable that Mark's words with reference to the cup, 'This means my covenant blood which is shed for many,' are more definite even than those of Paul, who has 'This cup means the new covenant ratified in my blood.' But is is doubtful

how far the divergence is really significant, for quite clearly Paul's interpretation of the Eucharist as sacrificial in character is of a piece with his whole theology of the Cross, and the words with reference to the cup as given both by Mark and Matthew are, if our theory is correct, ultimately dependent upon Pauline influence. When Matthew speaks of the blood of Jesus as 'shed for many to win the remission of their sins,' we are reminded of Paul's assertion in 1 Corinthians that 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' a doctrine which, while it may conceivably have had its roots in a pre-Pauline theology, can scarcely go back to Jesus himself, since it involves not only meditation by the community upon the stumbling-block of the cross, but no less clearly the detailed employment of the Proof from Scripture as an effective means to that stumbling-block's removal.

What then is the significance of Paul's claim to have 'received from the Lord' his account of the institution of the Lord's Supper? Certainly it amounts to more than an assertion that what he told his Corinthian converts had previously been told to him by the primitive community. And while there is possibly no need to assume a claim on the part of the Apostle to have received a special vision, or to have heard words believed actually to have been spoken by the exalted Christ, there is, on any interpretation of the words, a clear assertion that the Pauline narrative is based throughout upon divine authority, and therewith assuredly a not unnatural implication that what Paul relates actually differs from, and is indeed superior to,

the more primitive accounts of the Lord's Supper and its original significance.

What then are the positive results of our investigation? Let it be said at once that they are both tentative and relatively meagre. And that precisely for this reason dogmatic assertions, embittered controversy, a noisy and partisan defence of rival doctrines, are more than usually to be deprecated. We may assert with some degree of confidence, following the shorter text of Luke, that Jesus, having in mind the nearness of his own death, pledged his disciples in the toast of the Kingdom. We may go further and maintain with probability that the sacrament of the Eucharist as subsequently celebrated in the Christian Church originated in the breaking of the bread by Jesus at the Last Supper, and his use of the words, 'This means my body.' And, again, it may be regarded as not perhaps unlikely that the words were connected with the thought of the passover, of the approaching death of Jesus, and his ultimate reunion with his friends within the Realm of God.

That our Lord intended to institute a permanent rite is on the whole improbable. Apart from the Fourth Gospel there is no hint of sacramental teaching in the recorded utterances of Jesus, except in the general sense that for him the glory of God was seen in the common things of daily life. Moreover, his personality was allied to the prophetic type, a type which, while not necessarily hostile to rites and institutions as such, is wont to regard them at best in the light of non-essentials, and at worst as positive hindrances to the soul's unhampered

intercourse with God. Furthermore, the belief which Jesus held as to a speedy and visible coming of the Kingdom would seem to make the inauguration of a permanent rite at once unnecessary and irrelevant to the occasion. On the other hand the personal followers of Jesus could not well have failed either to link their memories of him with what appears to have been a characteristic action, or to be conscious of their Master's presence when they met together to take food in common. And the rapid development of the 'breaking of the bread' into something not far removed from a specific rite is not only vouched for by the testimony of Acts, but was itself inherently probable, and (may we not add?) essentially fitting also.

Even Paul has built up the structure of his own sacramental doctrine from a basis supplied by the happenings in the Upper Room. For him too the rite has a definitely eschatological significance, which reminds us of the cup of farewell and of the words of Jesus about the Kingdom of God Further, in the mind of Paul no less than in the thought of the first disciples the rite possessed, as we have already seen, the twofold significance of an act of fellowship with the Lord and with the community of his followers. But whereas for those present in the Upper Room, fellowship stood for the natural, human intercourse of friend with friend, for Paul it implied a communion—mystical, spiritual, sacramental, an intimacy directly effected by the solemn participation in a sacred rite, a rite to be repeated as a memorial of the sacrificial death of Jesus,

a rite linked in the Apostle's mind with penalties of a character strictly physical.

Again, on the assumption that Luke's version of the words of Jesus is most nearly original, it becomes at least probable that we owe to Paul himself the specifically sacrificial character attributed to the rite in 1 Corinthians xi., where the definitely sacramental use of the cup is connected with the sacrificial covenant-blood of the crucified Saviour. Here is a development sufficiently revolutionary, and the process may be seen at a stage yet further advanced in the discourse on the Bread of Life in the Fourth Gospel, though here, as Professor Kennett suggests, the growing tendency (which Paul fostered) to regard the Christian sacrament as of the same nature as a pagan Mystery may have led the Evangelist deliberately to transfer the discourse to an occasion when literal eating and drinking were not to be thought of.

It will doubtless appear to many that this discussion of the origin and significance of the Lord's Supper is curiously inconclusive. The discussion itself may even be judged out of place in a volume which makes no attempt to deal at length with New Testament problems. But it will have served a useful purpose if it succeeds in making clear the extraordinary complexity of the whole subject, and the consequent danger and futility of cocksure pronouncements.

Professor Lake, who is no champion of popular orthodoxy, maintains that the Catholic doctrine of the sacraments is actually more primitive than the Protestant, that is to say that a doctrine of divine

grace effectively communicated by participation in holy things has more support from the New Testament than, for example, a view of the Eucharist which makes its value merely symbolical, commemorative and declaratory. If by primitive we mean Pauline Professor Lake is no doubt right. But the claim as he presents it amounts only to this, that both Catholic and Pauline doctrines are not merely primitive but pre-Christian. And it is certainly the case that much that we find in Paul's thought about the Eucharist can scarcely claim to have belonged to what we may call the Theology of the Upper Room, while no less certainly it possesses at many points strong affinities with the ideas of the Mysteries.

But this chapter will have been written to small purpose if it has conveyed the impression that origins are everything, and that the significance and present value of a rite are to be judged solely by its primitive beginnings. If the phrase, 'What Jesus did not say on earth, he may have said from heaven' has obvious dangers, it yet serves to express a truth which must be kept in mind. The value of the Eucharist must be tested not merely by its origin, but by what it has come to be in the course of centuries. The rite, as we have it to-day, is one 'instinct with the personality of Christ,' offering to learned and simple alike a dramatic presentation of the central Christian convictions that the world cannot afford to ignore the life, death and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, that intimate fellowship with the living Christ is now as ever an experience open to all who seek it, that

only in the spirit of true brotherhood can the problem of living together find an adequate solution. Here are truths which men reject at their peril, and apart from the witness of the Eucharist their expression would be robbed of much of its dramatic power and appeal.

Thus while on grounds of historical criticism we may hold the Quakers to be justified in setting aside the use of sacraments, we may yet legitimately question their wisdom in so doing. On the other hand, when, as has been recently admitted by Mr. A. E. J. Rawlinson, a very definite Anglo-Catholic, we can know singularly little about eucharistic origins, a heavy responsibility must rest with those who would 'unchurch' Friends and others for non-conformity in the outward use of sacramental rites. Nor can we look with patience upon the attitude of those Anglicans who would question the 'validity' of the sacraments of the Free Churches. If within the New Testament itself we find varying and partly divergent views as to the significance of the Eucharist, uniformity of interpretation is scarcely likely to be obtained to-day. If, again, from the days of Paul onwards, conceptions relatively unworthy have been from time to time connected with the doctrine of the Eucharist, to point to the presence of superstitious beliefs and practices in some quarters to-day is not merely legitimate, but a clear duty. Nor will the cry of infidel or the hurling of charges of heresy atone for the lack of reasoned argument and unprejudiced study.

While therefore the Eucharist as a sacrament of

fellowship may fittingly occupy an honoured position in the affections and practice of a united Church, we end as we began, with an expression of regret that Lambeth should seem to belittle enquiry, and light-heartedly to ignore intricate problems and deep-rooted differences of thought and temperament, by a dogmatic reference to sacraments as 'divinely instituted,' and for that reason rigidly binding upon all who would claim fellowship with the universal Church.

# Chapter XII.

## The Church Adventurous

It must be clear to every reader of the New Testament that the first followers of Jesus were men filled with a spirit of high-hearted adventure which carried them forward undismayed to the stupendous task of a world's redemption. It must be evident also that this spirit was kindled in the lives of the original disciples by contact with the courageous personality of their Master. From him they caught the contagion of a great enthusiasm, and wherever that enthusiasm has shown itself throughout the Christian centuries, its origin can be traced unerringly to the same vital relationship with a living Christ. The earliest Christian creed, 'Jesus is Lord,' involved nothing less than a resolution to accept his leadership in every enterprise, and to see the world through his eyes. 'One loving spirit sets another on fire.'

The life of the historical Jesus, giving as it does complete expression to the fundamental truths of the Fatherhood of God, the sonship and brotherhood of man, and the supremacy of service as the one adequate motive of human action, was of necessity a life of adventure, finding its inevitable culmination in the sorrowful triumph of Calvary. It it be true that 'the cross is more like him than anything else he ever did,' his own frank assertion

that discipleship and suffering are inseparable is abundantly justified. In what has been aptly termed 'the divine adventure of the Incarnation,' nothing was certain beforehand except the cross. 'The young Prince of glory,' pledged to the doing of his Father's will, is the greatest adventurer the world has known, the fitting leader of that company of daring spirits who, as Bunyan has it, will 'hazard all for God at a clap,' holding life cheap in the service of a great cause.

The first friends of Jesus came at length to accept wholeheartedly his own estimate of what discipleship involved. Endorsing the interpretation of life's meaning which he had given them, they too found in the doing of God's will an effective solution of the problem of human happiness. Like Jesus himself they measured the value of the humblest life by the individual's capacity for divine sonship; like him they saw mankind as a brotherhood, and the world as a field for unselfish service; like him they braced their shoulders to the weight of the cross, and rejoicing in the splendour of their task resolved at whatever cost to win the nations to his allegiance.

Thus the Church of the first age is best described as a company of adventurers for Christ. Its standard of values, the objective to be achieved, the spirit which inspired the work—all were his and of his making. The power which turned the world upside down was the power of the living Christ; the splendid daring which sent age-long barriers of class, race and sex crashing down before the sanctified common sense of the Apostle Paul, was but

the logical outcome of his spirit's working; his presence was an intense and life-transforming reality to all his followers, and fellowship with him the all-sufficient bond of union whereby the Christian society was held together. The 'Holy Spirit,' which directed alike the activities of the individual and the policy of the community as a whole, is termed explicitly 'the Spirit of Jesus'; from him as the leader and inspirer of every enterprise the Church received the over-mastering passion for service which sent forth its members to the work of constructing out of the seemingly unpromising materials of contemporary life the fabric of a Christian world.

On any estimate of the present situation the difference between the Church of the first days and the Church as we see it now is sufficiently disquieting to call for comment, and to justify, substantially at any rate, the storm of criticism and censure which shows as yet but little sign of abating. Whereas once the Lordship of Christ was the central article of the Church's faith, and fellowship with him the source of its very life, the necessary incentive to its manifold activities, to-day the accusation that 'the Churches are un-Christlike' forms the sum and substance of all legitimate complaint. Whereas in the first days the implications of the doctrine of human brotherhood were pressed with relentless logic to their revolutionary and gloriously disturbing conclusions, to-day we find on all hands a decided preference for divisive barriers and barbed wire entanglements, of a kind for which Paul at any rate would have had the

scantiest possible appreciation. In place of the spirit of adventure, the passion for truth, the policy of forward-looking initiative, which characterised the life and activities of the primitive Church, we have to be content for the most part with a Church which exalts timidity as a virtue, a Church eager to dig itself in, and to cling desperately to the ignoble security afforded by the old trenches of traditional thought, a Church which loves the apathy of stagnation, and calls it the wise reluctance of the true Conservative to depart rashly from the old ways. All things considered, Dr. Orchard's speculation as to whether the apostles would be more astonished at the Anglican Church or the Anglican Church at the apostles, is one which might profitably engage the attention of many twentieth century Christians.

Dr. T. R. Glover goes to the root of the matter in his assertion that the Church to-day 'is not making enough of Jesus Christ.' Its comparative ineffectiveness is due beyond all else to the loss of his spirit. Individuals there may be who are truly spirit-led; but no one would dare to affirm that the organised communities of his followers are clearly and undeniably guided in their outlook and activities by the spirit of Christ. The contempt or indifference with which the ordinary man regards the Churches, when compared with the large measure of respect and even admiration accorded by him to the person of Jesus Christ, is a sufficient indication that something is wrong. However arbitrary and ill-informed his judgment, the ordinary man is unfortunately justified in his conviction that between the spirit

of Christ and the spirit of the Church which professes to represent him there is too often a degree of difference amounting almost to positive contradiction.

Now it is obvious that a Church which attempts to do the work of Christ apart from the power and inspiration of his spirit, deserves failure and will inevitably achieve it. Without Christ's leadership the use of his name is of no avail. If the Church lacks a policy of adventurous daring, if inspired direction, a joyous recklessness of service, and a ready willingness to bear the cross, are wanting among Christ's followers to-day, it is because 'things not characteristically Christian' have been the Church's main concern.

It is said with truth that the Church has 'specialised in irrelevancies,' while too frequently ignoring the things that count. With one party 'Catholic Tradition' has become almost an obsession, and the temporary expedients of one age have been erected into divisive barriers for all time. The gold of spiritual fellowship in Christ has been bartered for the dross of uniformity of organisation. The spontaneous movement of the Spirit has been checked and limited by an un-Christian insistence upon the importance of outward unanimity. The timorous conservativism of another party has made a fetish of the Bible, and sought to obstruct the progress of scholarship in one sphere after another of biblical research. In all parties alike a conventional and legalistic morality has laid almost exclusive stress upon the 'Don'ts,' until the Church is now thought by many to consist chiefly of 'people

who disapprove of things.' Everywhere organised Christianity has played for safety, and exalted the negative virtues. Religion and selfishness have become synonymous for many minds. The Decalogue, not the Sermon on the Mount, has been the Church's real charter. Caution, 'for which there is no beatitude, which does not count among the fruits of the Spirit,' has come to occupy the place of honour as the acknowledged queen of ecclesiastical virtues.

Criticism is at once easier and less valuable than suggestions of constructive reform. Yet criticism has an essential, though subordinate place in clearing the ground for the positive work of amelioration which the situation demands. And in what follows the failure of the Church will be briefly considered under three heads, the aim throughout being ultimately positive, since allegations of disloyalty to Christ and consequent inefficiency are made solely in the interests of reform and future success.

In the first place, as we have already seen, Christ stood unflinchingly for the fundamental truth of the Fatherhood of God. In his own life he lived out all the implications of that stupendous doctrine. Therefore no presentation of Christianity which fails to show God to man as Christ revealed Him, or which shrinks from the fearless application of the truth that God is Father to the interpretation of the whole sum of human experience, has the smallest claim on our acceptance. The chaotic and misleading conceptions of the divine character which make up the theology of the Christian in

the street, and to which we have had occasion frequently to refer, are directly due to the confused teaching about God given by the official ministries of all Churches. Too often, indeed, 'the Church has been occupied in religion with something other than God.' Too often God has been relegated to the circumference of Christian thought. Nor is the reason far to seek. Christ's clear revelation of the divine nature as suffering love has been so clouded and caricatured by the subtleties of the theologians and the ungodly acts of God's accredited representatives, that men have grown confused or disgusted, and God has ceased to count even for those who serve Him unwittingly by lives conformable to the guidance of His spirit.

'It were better to have no conception of God at all than one which is unworthy of Him.' To the official presentation of an unworthy conception of God the Church must plead guilty. Its teachers have ignored the fundamental distinction between the tribal deity of primitive Hebrew religion and the Father of Jesus Christ; they have concentrated attention on supposed ceremonial requirements while tacitly ignoring ethical demands. Too often they have made of God a national potentate, voicing with suspicious docility the sentiments of His worshippers. Hence it has come about that the cause of religion, of morality, and of the unity of mankind has suffered grievous and irremediable harm.

We need above all else to recover the central conviction of the New Testament that God is revealed in Jesus Christ. By that test every

conception of the divine character must stand or fall. There must be far greater courage in rejecting explicitly all ideas of God in current orthodoxy which obscure or contradict the revelation of the Father in Christ. Unless God counts, there can be no world reconstruction worthy of the name. But if God is to count everywhere, if men are to find in Him strength and inspiration for the tasks which lie ahead, they must first see Him as He is. Now as ever the paramount duty of the Church is to proclaim Christ Crucified as the eternal revelation of the mind and heart of a Father–God.

But in the second place, if the Church by its departure from the teaching of Christ has failed to make God count in the life of nations nominally Christian, its practical distortion of the New Testament doctrine of Man has contributed no less disastrously to the evils which disgrace the world of human relationships as it exists to-day.

For Christ, the individual, in view of his status of divine sonship, was of infinite value as an independent personality. He could have said with George Fox that there was 'that of God' in the nature of every man, something which rendered possible the response even of the hardened and ignorant to the divine appeal, so that by the immediate guidance of God's spirit a man might come directly to the progressive recognition of divine truth. Admittedly the Church's acknowledgment of these cardinal articles of the Christian creed has been lamentably inadequate.

A merely nominal belief in human equality, carefully restricted as regards its practical appli-

cation, to the conditions of another life, has been powerless to prevent the establishment of a social order rooted and grounded in oppression and class hatred. The spirit of fellowship, which should surely be the distinguishing characteristic of any society which lays claim to the title Christian, does not flourish among those who profess Christ to-day. In the past the Church has habitually taken sides. In England since the Industrial Revolution it has, broadly speaking, stood with the rich against the poor, with the party of reaction against the forces of progress and reform. National Churches in time of war have blindly accepted the interpretation of events current in their own countries, and have stood rather for the sectional claims of a nation than for the rights of humanity. The conviction that 'men matter' has grown but slowly. The Church has not regarded the problems which beset mankind 'from the human end.' It has looked at the problems of a nation through class spectacles, and at the problems of a world through national spectacles, with the result that its vision has been distorted, and its official pronouncements of little weight. Men matter! Without that Christlike certainty the Church is powerless to assist in the building of a new world.

According to Dr. Bethune Baker: 'The putting off to another life in another world of the hope of the Kingdom and the realisation of its conditions is perhaps the greatest apostasy that the history of religion can disclose.' And assuredly the outstanding failure of organised Christianity to-day is seen in the apparent inability of Christians to devise

a social and international ethic in vital correspondence with their religious faith. Orthodoxy hitherto has stressed all too lightly the challenging 'Therefores' of its theological creed. *Because* God is Father, *because* men are sons of God and members of a world-wide brotherhood, *because* these things are true according to the faith of Jesus, whose teaching we profess to accept as the expression of the divine mind, *therefore* certain consequences inevitably follow. In a word, genuine Christianity must touch life at all points. 'Every part of life must be inspired by all that we know of God through Christ.'

Here then is a call not for impassioned oratory, still less for the windy platitudes of the armchair idealist, but rather for hard and sober thinking under the guidance of 'the spirit that is called Christ.' All human relationships from the widest to the most personal come up for judgment before the vision, at once splendid and humiliating, of the world-city of God. Those who believe in human brotherhood, who share the optimism of Jesus and his unfaltering faith in the capacity of ordinary men to achieve great things, must condemn with no uncertain voice the customary 'Deification of the Actual' as militant atheism and a denial of the divinity of Christ.

If hitherto international relationships have remained essentially at the sub-human level, so that History may be rightly defined in words recently attributed to Lord Balfour, as 'a discreditable episode in the life-story of one of the minor planets,' is not the reason to be found where F. W. Robertson

found it, in the circumstance that 'Christianity has been too much preached as theology, too little as the religion of daily life; too much as a religion only for individuals, too little as a religion for nations and for the world'? Again, if social and economic relationships within the State reflect the conditions of the battle-field, the divorce court or the hen-run rather than those which should characterise the life and activities of a united family of reasonable persons, is not the trouble due to this, that no concerted attempt to formulate the social implications of Christ's teaching in their immediate bearing upon all the complex conditions of modern life has ever been seriously made?

Organised Christianity still lacks the world view, the international mind, the sense of corporate responsibility for social abuses. Even a genuine loyalty to our own national group has been but too often vitiated by an attitude of radical selfishness towards the interests of other groups. The clear-eyed patriotism of those who dare to measure their country's greatness by its capacity to contribute to the greatness of other nations frequently degenerates into the myopia of the mere jingo, for whom the instinct for a herd fellowship, formed and cemented by a dominant sense of hostility to a rival herd, takes the place of a desire for international co-operation in the interests of the world as a whole. M. Clemenceau has committed himself to the statement that 'peace is but war pursued in another manner.' If he is right, and if the doctrine holds not only as between nations, but likewise between economic and social groups within the

State, then the profession of Christianity becomes sheer waste of time, inasmuch as Christ's doctrine of Man as a son of God and a member of a world-wide brotherhood is seen to be nothing better than the empty dream of an unpractical idealist. But if Clemenceau and those who think with him are stupidly and tragically wrong in their entire outlook, then the Church is pledged to a definite repudiation of their whole philosophy, and to a no less definite campaign, having as its avowed object the application of the principles of Christ to the conduct of individual, social and international relationships of whatever kind.

In practice the essentially Christian belief in the ordinary man's capacity for goodness has received scant recognition from the Church as a whole. In Calvinism, and systems of Calvinistic colouring, 'man is reduced for theological purposes to his lowest terms'; his initiative is taken from him in the supposed interests of a divine compassion working with seeming capriciousness, arbitrarily bestowed, and no less arbitrarily withheld; he becomes little more than a human channel for the professedly gracious activities of an irresponsible potentate.

The Church of Rome on the other hand has frankly acquiesced in a double standard of conduct, thereby doing much to deprive its members of the stimulus of high ideals, and setting the stamp of its approval upon the conventional observance of a religion, of which the very essence is a refusal to rest content with present attainments.

In all Churches alike there is a tendency to be

shocked at that which is not shocking, and to approve that to which approbation does not properly belong. But to create imaginary sins and fictitious virtues is to destroy reality, and with it the sense of ethical values, upon the preservation of which all true progress, alike for the individual and for the community, must ultimately depend. If man is not 'equipped for perfection,' there is no place for the Christian Church; but if Christ's faith in humanity is justified, then the courageous avowal of the worth of the individual, and a corresponding readiness to accept its manifold implications, must constitute an integral part of the Church's witness in any age.

Moreover, the Church has departed from the Christian doctrine of Man, inasmuch as the right of the individual to follow the dictates of his own conscience has been very generally ignored. The voice of God within the soul has been refused freedom of utterance. Hence have come wars, massacres, persecutions, heresy hunts, and all the sorry spectacle of ecclesiastical bigotry and intolerance. Truth has been stifled by orthodoxy, freedom chained by the shackles of imposed belief. The guidance of the living Spirit has been ignored and flouted in the interests of dead forms. And men have seen in the Church not the courageous champion of truth, but the timid persecutor of the pioneer and adventurer in the search for God.

It has been forgotten that a Church which looks wholly to the past has no living message for the men of the present. Timidity will not save the world. Men 'cannot live on the spiritual treasure

of yesterday.' The Church must lead the progressive thought of the day or it will perish. And for leadership there is need of courage, initiative, and above all a glad readiness to live by the inspiration of truth revealed progressively by the living God to living men.

But in the third place a failure on the part of the Church to proclaim wholeheartedly the Christian doctrine whether of God or Man, has brought with it a corresponding inability to present to the world a right interpretation of the significance of life.

Among all the Churches where do we find the spirit of reckless self-forgetfulness, of infectious enthusiasm for the cause of God, of passionate, unstinted endeavour in the service of man, which characterised the life and teaching of Jesus Christ? The Church, like the world, has accepted the miserable philosophy of the limited ideal, the second best. Christ's programme of unrestricted service has been practically ignored, and in its place there has grown up the petty concern for doctrinal correctness, or temporal advantage, with the resultant evils of disunion, narrowness, and internecine strife.

A Church Catholic not merely in name, but in spirit and in fact, would rank as the most powerful influence making for world co-operation which it is possible to conceive. Unfortunately the gulf between what is and what might be is of the widest. While ideally the religion of Christ should stand first among the great international possessions—art, literature, science, scholarship, which assure the peoples of the world that they are essentially

one, in actual fact religious differences are among the most stubborn barriers in the way of international efforts for world-service.

The spectacle of a divided Church preaching brotherhood to a divided world is only matched in pathetic absurdity by the companion picture of a Church whose besetting sins are self-love and narrowness of outlook, urging mankind to follow Christ's path of self-forgetting sacrifice in the service of humanity. If it be true that 'the only safeguard of the purity of the Church is the intensity of its own missionary passion,' and true also that 'the first credential of every living movement in civilisation is the capacity for sacrifice which it is able to create,' then we have here the essential test by which the Church's success or failure may be justly estimated. How far is the Church to-day faithful to its task of world-transformation? In what measure can it inspire men with 'the capacity for sacrifice,' not in its own service, but in the service of a living Lord?

Given a second Pentecost, a genuine inflowing of the Christ spirit into the hearts of his followers, how stupendous would be the change in the Church's life and outlook! Lack of fellowship with Christ has meant the loss of his life-giving presence, the substitution of sectional ideals for his world-wide vision, the rejection of his scale of values in favour of the lower standards of uninspiring mediocrity. A Church without the stimulus to adventure afforded by the recognised companionship of Christ has had but small courage either to attack the strongholds of social tyranny, or to undertake

'the great imperial enterprises of the Kingdom.' In literal truth everything depends upon the recovery by the Church of a genuine Christian outlook, a temper of adventurous daring in the prosecution of its Lord's behests.

A Church true to its own highest ideals of Christ-like service would draw life and power from daily intercourse with a living God. Its leaders, no longer placidly content with the anomalous position of 'private chaplains to the devout,' would substitute for the old emphasis on negations a courageous challenge to the world to live out in the complexity of practical affairs the revolutionary implications of the Christian faith. Men 'all of God Almighty's making,' set apart for Christ's service by 'the mighty ordination of the Pierced Hands,' it would be theirs to lead with 'inspired recklessness' the company of true crusaders against the hosts of evil.

A Church 'living as its Lord died,' staking its very existence on loyalty to the values of Christ, willing to pay the ultimate price for a world's salvation, would win adherents by the magnitude of its appeal. In the Incarnation and the Cross God has set His seal to the truth that adventure and sacrifice are the very stuff of which life is made. And it is true likewise that 'all the war virtues . . . . may find permanent and satisfying vent in the crusade of the Kingdom of God.' A Church which can teach such lessons will never lack support from the best elements of a nation's youth.

Finally, where fellowship with God is a reality there can be 'no resting in past openings of truth.' The measure of the Church's unwillingness to wel-

come the pioneer and the reformer is the measure of its practical disbelief in a living God. But a Church of Christian adventurers pledged 'to make the experiment of *applied Christianity* on a scale as large as the world' is the one power great enough to achieve the world's salvation. The social problem, the industrial problem, the international problem, the missionary problem, the problem of Christian unity—all alike depend for their solution upon the adequate recognition of the divine Fatherhood, of human brotherhood, of man's worth to God, of service, in small things as in great, as the one permanently satisfying motive of human endeavour. A Church which, like the great prophets of the Old Testament, 'will go humbly to school with the living God,' in order to learn His lessons, a Church whose acknowledged function it is to raise men everywhere to their true status of divine sonship, will gain the allegiance of the human race, while revealing in its own life the surpassing loveliness of the spirit that is called Christ.

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